

## 25 Bonner History Roundtable: Churches of Bonner

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<https://youtu.be/-a3RFR4jXXE?si=1cViClgJzwWVu9ce>

*Kim Briggeman representing St. Ann Catholic Church*

*Carl Rohr representing Our Savior's Lutheran Church*

This program has been edited for clarity.

(Intro music and credits)

[00:00:58] **Rick Swanson:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to welcome you to our roundtable discussion. And I have a few thank yous here. This presentation is being recorded by Missoula Community Access Television as part of a media assistance grant donated by MCAT. For your information, visit [MCAT.org](http://MCAT.org). And we'd like to thank Friends of Two Rivers for sponsoring the Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum for this grant and to MCAT for providing this important gift to preserve our timber heritage history. Thanks also to St. Ann Catholic Church for allowing us to have this facility. Thanks to Joe Brown and Walter Peckham, the sound technicians over here.

And as you can see, we have coffee and cookies over here, so you can help yourself at any time. Now, the restrooms are back here in the corner to the right. After the program, you're invited to have a pasty supper that St. Ann is putting on and they are delicious. I know because I get them every year.

And, me being Swedish, I was asked to say something in Swedish and I am going to do something that my father taught me years ago and you might recognize the tune.

[00:03:10 – 00:03:40] (Rick sings in Swedish) (applause)

We had three that were going to be on this program. And Dan Taylor, who was the pastor for Hope Baptist, he was invited, but he cancelled because he had a family emergency.

And we have Kim Briggeman over here, and he grew up in the St. Ann Catholic parish. After his family moved to the area in 1958, he started his career as an altar boy in second grade near the end of the Latin mass era, and he and a couple of buddies began serving as lecturers at the Hurley High School. Kim and Linda were married in St. Ann in 1983. Three daughters and both of their granddaughters have been baptized in the church. Kim is currently a member of the parish council.

[00:05:09] And, we have Carl Rohr over here, who was born and raised in Cleveland which is close to Lakewood and Westlake, Ohio, before attending Capitol University in what is now Trinity Lutheran Cemetery in Bexley, Ohio. His internship first brought him to Townsend, Montana. Upon completion of seminary, he served parishes in Wibaux; Hamilton; Post Falls, Idaho; Billings; and Bonner. He was a pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Bonner from '92 to 2006. He is the father of four children: Scott in St. Paul, Steve in Hollywood, Jennifer in Minneapolis, Gretchen in Washington D. C. Carl and his husband John Winchell now live in Ronan.

Oh, I forgot one thing. Next month, March 19<sup>th</sup>, Dennis Sain is going to be entertaining us with a discussion of the logging camps, which included the Headquarters Camp in Woodworth, Montana. And that is here at 2 p.m.

And I will leave this now with Kim Briggeman.

**Kim Briggeman:** Thank you, Rick, and thanks everybody for coming out on this sunny day to come inside and listen to this. I appreciate the turnout. We had hoped to include the Hope Baptist in this as the third standing church in Bonner and Dan Taylor was at our planning meeting, but he was called out of town. The beauty of that would have been, we were thinking, because our two churches - the Lutheran and Catholic churches - were started in the first decade of the 1900s. And Hope Baptist was built in 1996, so in the last decade of the century. It would have been a good compare and contrast on how the community has changed. Because really I want to make this, or we want to make this, Bonner's story through our church history. So with that said, if there are people that can lend their own stories from the Hope Baptist perspective here today, we sure hope you chime in, because we're going to turn it over to all of you at different points in this presentation.

And I tried to write on the board over there to give you an idea of what our subjects were going to be after we get done with our creation stories as we're calling them. My job right now, though, is to set the scene. When the two churches were built, the first St. Ann church was built in 1905; the first Our Savior's Lutheran was built in 1910. And we're talking a whole different century. And what was going on in Bonner at that time? In 1905, one of the landmark events, they started building the dam in 1905. And in 1910 the streetcar arrived in Bonner from Missoula, the electric streetcar. And of course, those two events are closely associated because Senator William

A. Clark was the financier and the developer of both events. And, of course, the power that the dam generated was what ran the streetcar system and most other things in Missoula. Can you hear me?

So what was going on culture-wise in the early 1900s? In 1908, Emil Zaugg's trophy goat, shot on Sheep Mountain, received a prize at the St. Louis World's Fair. It was stuffed and sent to the fair by Dr. Cunningham, who was practicing in Bonner, he shows up in a lot of Bonner history stories.

[00:10:15] The early automobiles were essentially motorized buggies, and they were reaching Montana during this time when our churches were beginning. Ford Motor Company was established just a couple years before this church was built in 1903, but it was Oldsmobile, the one cylinder, three horsepower, tiller-steered, curb-dash, automobiles were the big sellers.

And we started out here with old, scratchy rendition by the Denver Nightingale, called Billy Murray. He had the number three song in 1905. And it was, "In My Merry Oldsmobile." That's why we started out with that song. Of course, the pop music, there were no iPods, no radio, no television. So how did we in Bonner get our music back then? In some cases it started in Vaudeville. It was passed into the popular, the mass culture by bands and orchestras. And whether we were singing back then or not here in Bonner, I don't know. I don't have any recordings from that.

In our minds, let's step outside the door here. If it's 1905, and you look to your right, you're gonna see, off in the distance, you're gonna see the lumber mill that was built and started producing in 1886 way down there. But closer, you're going to see what was called the Bonner House. The Bonner House was a stage station, a bar, a hotel. I think it was two or three stories high. It was where Kelly Pine baseball field is right now, on the other side of the pine trees. So that's what you'd see first and foremost, if you look to your right in 1905.

If you look to your left, there's the Northern Pacific Station across the way. And straight out in front of here, like there is today, was the county road from Missoula and to everywhere else. There was no junction right here, as I understand it. The county road in the early days ran and forked right about midway when you're passing Bonner School. The road turned towards the mountain and right where the breezeway is basically and the new cafeteria in Bonner School. And then it would have forked, part of it, going on up to Bonner when it got near where the railroad tracks are now. And then it kept on going up the Clark Fork to Butte and Boston - or wherever - and the other portion.

So let's, now it's 1910 and we step outside the door and it's a different view. Closest, right in front of us almost, is the new school. 1907, they built the two story wooden schoolhouse. Sort of where the Bonner School is right now, but even though I think it was a little closer if I remember right, there are many of you here that probably went to that school. It was closed down, I think, in 1957 and torn down after the new school was built. Before 1907, Bonner had a school, but it was at the end of Bonner. It was in the second floor of Masonic Hall. Yes?

**Unknown speaker:** That school was razed in 1956 because I graduated from it in 1955.

**Kim Briggeman:** Okay, the wooden, the two story, that was right here was razed in '56, okay. The reason that they moved the school, and they built a new school here, rather than the end of Bonner, is obviously things were hopping. Milltown was just getting started in 1903. 1904, I think, is when it was laid out by William Clark, and so the population of the mill was growing, and the town was growing. There was some pushback of the mill workers' kids that had to go all the way to the end of Bonner to go to school, and so this was a compromise location as I understand, yet, like the churches, were built on land given to them by the mill, the Big Blackfoot Milling Company, which turned into Anaconda.

[00:15:18] It's 1910, we're looking out the front window here, or front door, and you have the school to your right, and to your left, of course, you have the new Lutheran church which is basically, I think, where the current one is on that location. And Carl will fill you in on that as we go along here in a minute. These two churches have stood side by side then, ever since, for the last 107 years. And we'll be able to get into, not only our individual histories a little bit, and memories but when we intermingled, which happens more often than you probably think. Or, maybe not, but, sit back and listen. Now we're going to start off with our creation stories that date back to 1905 or 1910. And I'm gonna turn it over to Carl.

**Carl Rohr:** When I look around the room, I'm thinking some of you should be up here instead of me, because I know you know a lot more history than I do. I was thinking on the way down from Ronan that I arrived in Bonner, it will be almost 25 years ago. It'll be 25 years ago in June, which seems like a long time and seems like yesterday at the same time. But that's just a minor portion of the history that we're talking about today. So we both invite you to join in the conversation whenever you want to. After each one of our segments, we'll open it up to you and if you have memories, stories, and corrections that you want to make we're happy to have you voice them. So please keep that in mind.

The history of Lutheranism in the United States is much like the history of the country itself. The nation is a nation of a lot of immigrants. Lutherans came from other places. Predominantly, from Germany and from the Scandinavian countries, but if those groups had probably not come, one wonders what the Lutheran Church would be today. They settled in many different areas, and each little group, when they would settle in a particular area, would form a church, because the church was to be a part of their community. You had all of these Lutheran churches, rather small ones, serving the needs of the individual groups where they had settled.

You might have them very close to each other, because this group spoke only Finn, and this group spoke only Norwegian, and this group spoke only Swedish. So how could they worship together? So, the church has not only been an immigrant church, but it also has been a church of merging because when English became used more and more and became the predominant language in the country, then these churches started to ask, "Why are we here speaking our English, and you're five miles down the road and you're speaking English? We can understand each other. Why don't we come together?" And so not just the language, but the customs started adapting to this new country and churches came together. So the whole history of the Lutheran Church has been a history of coming together and a history of merging.

There's only one exception to that, and that's the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. They were formed in 1847 by Saxon and German immigrants. And that church pretty much stayed the same with its headquarters in Missouri. They were called the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other states, to begin with. And then, on their 100th anniversary in 1947, they changed their name to Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. But other Lutherans, little by little, have been coming together through the years. I think about that when I think about Bonner and about those early years in Bonner, because there were certainly all of these different ethnic and nationality groups present in this area.

[00:20:14] I learned that very early on when I came to Bonner. We had a group of Swedes, and a group of Norwegians, and a group of Finns, and so forth and so on. And, initially, they weren't always terribly friendly towards each other. But little by little, it started to happen. Initially, in the early days of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, there had been a Swedish community church that had been built on the west end of the old black bridge in West Riverside in the very early 1900s, and the Swedes centered their worship life around that place.

When the Reverend H.O. Svavi came to Missoula in 1904, to organize St. Paul Lutheran Church, the Norwegians here in Bonner thought, "Oh, we ought to get in on that." And, "Wouldn't it be nice to have our own church out here in Bonner?" So they began to inquire and to form in their minds, and ultimately in their community, the dream of having a Norwegian Lutheran Church here in Bonner.

The Finns were also well represented in this area. People still talk of Finn Town. And in 1915, the Finns comprised two thirds of the population of Milltown. So it was a very Finnish town, and they had Finn Hall, and they had church services that were held in Finn Hall, and other things as well. With all these Scandinavian groups settling in this area, the Lutheran Church began to take off. And with the Reverend E.B. Osvold leading worship in 1906, and the congregation was then organized in 1908.

The worship services were held in Norwegian, and that went on for quite a while. Actually, it wasn't until 1935 when Norwegian was no longer used as the worship language of that group. I understand they weaned themselves. They started by one Sunday in English, and then two Sundays. But in 1935 they took away that one Sunday a month that they were using Norwegian and from then on everything was held in English.

The Ladies Aid, organized in 1907. And those of us who know anything about church know that when the ladies get going, things begin to happen. (audience chuckles) Early on in my ministry I found out that's where the money is. And that's where the passion is. And that's where the activity is. And the Ladies Aid really got going strong in this area amongst the Lutherans. And they began to make things happen. I'll talk a little more about it when I talk about our church buildings in a few minutes.

Soon, a Sunday school was formed. And the Sunday school at the Our Savior's Lutheran Church really skyrocketed during the years and I remember reading several times about when they had 124 students in their Sunday school and they think, "Oh, by today's standards, that's really quite amazing." But the Sunday School was organized, and in 1909 the congregation decided to build, that it was time to build on land that was provided to them by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. And the building was dedicated in October of 1910. The first resident pastor, they were often served out of Missoula in connection with St. Paul, and the first resident pastor arrived in August of 1949, Bernard Updahl. He then was followed by C.O. Anderson whose son Lowell would later marry Donna, the daughter of Melvin and Clara Madsen. And the pastor since then, and I'm going to just mention them because they're recent enough that some of us remember their names and so forth.

[00:25:04] Then was Herb Knutson, who died, what, two years ago or three years ago in Missoula. Dick Wiederhold, he and his wife Patsy still live up just out of Polson. Rod Kwame, who died this past year. Then

me. And then Cindy Phippenich from Bozeman served an interim, followed by Jean Larson, and currently the Eric Huseth is the pastor of the congregation. By my calculations, he's the 26th pastor of the congregation.

I think I'm going to stop there because I'm going to do a little more on buildings in a few minutes, but stories that you think of? Corrections? Comments? We want to do it while it's fresh. Yes.

**Jim Habeck:** You mentioned 120 kids in Sunday school. In my mind, that represented just 10 families back then. (Laughter)

**Carl Rohr:** You're right. (Laughs) You're right. Identify yourself, please.

**Jim Habeck:** Jim Habeck..

**Carl Rohr:** And... You are representing from what congregation?

**Jim Habeck:** First Presbyterian Church in Missoula, Montana. Dating back to 1867.

**Carl Rohr:** You've got a jump on us out here. (laughs) Yeah, please identify yourself when you speak.

Sue Iverson, and I'm from Our Savior's. Bob Peterson was after Dick Wiederholt.

**Carl Rohr:** Yes. I skipped. It's written here. Bob Peterson is currently in Idaho. Boise. I'm sorry about that. Thank you. Anyone else?

**Lowell Anderson:** Okay. I'm Lowell Anderson. I'm a retired pastor of the Lutheran denomination. My dad was Reverend C.O. Anderson who came to Our Savior's in 1953, I believe. December of 1953 until... January of '62. One of my memories, and this goes back to about, oh, I'd say 1956, 1957, was of Father Major. How many of you knew Father Major? Have you ever seen him in his black garb, white clergy collar, covered with sawdust? (Laughter). Okay. Pardon?

**Unknown speaker:** It was ashes from his cigarette. (Laughter)

**Lowell Anderson:** I never saw him smoke in my presence, but he helped me build some stuff. And my dad didn't have a table saw, but he did. And he would saw some wood and all of the shavings would cover all of his black garb. And it blended in very well with his white collar. But that was a thing I remember about the Lutheran and Catholic connection.

**Carl Rohr:** Nice. Anyone else?

**Kim Briggeman:** Can I chip in on that as well? Father Major was the Catholic pastor from 1945 to 1968. And he was our longest serving pastor. He came here in 1945 from Helmville. And a couple of years ago I was visiting the Geary Ranch in Helmville, and they were showing me around the house, and everywhere you looked up on the wall were art pieces, and he said, "That came from Father Major."

Apparently, Father Major, all through the years he was here, and since he was in Helmville, was a good friend of Madge Geary, who's the grandmother of Bob Geary, who lives in the house now in Helmville. And Bob said, "I told him I remember Father Major..." et cetera, et cetera. And he says, "Do you want one of these?"

[00:30:00] And so he has donated to the church, one of his wood carvings. (holds up carving) And I don't know if it's necessarily - I'm not a connoisseur - but it's a pretty cool representation of what Father Major did. And I had no idea, Lowell, that he was a woodworker, or that he was an artist. Apparently he was. Lots of cabinetry, lots of paintings and stuff are up at that house now. I was going to save that for the arts and music section.

**Cliff Iverson:** My name is Cliff Iverson and I grew up here in the community. Did you say there was not a permanent pastor in 1927?

[00:30:34] **Carl Rohr:** Permanent in the sense that he served St. Paul and Bonner, but the first one that resided here.

**Cliff Iverson:** I just dug out my mother's Bible. I think it was her confirmation Bible dated June, 1927. She would have been 14 years old, and that's one of the reasons I came today, hoping I'd find out who the pastor was.

**Carl Rohr:** I can tell you that in '27. I'll look it up.

**Cliff Iverson:** Okay, I'll see you after the meeting.

**Carl Rohr:** I didn't name all the pastors preceding '49, but the first one that actually lived here, they built a parsonage and lived here. And was not serving St. Paul as well.

**Cliff Iverson:** I'm assuming this was her confirmation Bible. It says SS, which would be Sunday School. But it's got Our Savior's Lutheran on it.

**Carl Rohr:** No, it was being served by a pastor. It was just that they didn't have their own pastor apart from a connection with another congregation. Uhuh. Anyone else?

This isn't strictly Bonner, but this is how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America came to be. (shows chart) I told you about mergers. Here are all these down here that ultimately worked into this church. I'll lay this here if anybody's interested in seeing it later.

**Kim Briggeman:** (Interruption in the recording) I'm sorry. That was a misunderstanding. I just wanted to let you know that there are two history books for each of our parishes. Ours was written, *A Century of Grace*, in 2005 on the centennial of St. Ann. And, *Our Savior's Lutheran* was written, with Carl's input, in 2008. The centennial would've been 2010? Is that or am I...

**Carl Rohr:** That's the building. The foundation was organized in '08. (unclear)

**Kim Briggeman:** Okay. I've got you. I'm going to start out by reading a short article from the Missoula paper dated June 15th, 1905,

"New Church for Bonner. Father Filippi stated yesterday that a church would be built at Bonner in the near future."

Father Filippi was from St. Francis Xavier, which was about 15 years old at that time.

"He holds monthly services there at present, and owing to the large increase of the attendance and the wishes of the congregation, it was thought advisable to build. The plans have already been drawn by architect Gibson. And the specifications are in the hands of the contractors. It is thought that active operations on the building will commence within a month."

They built things fast back then. That was in June and I believe in August was the first service in the first St. Ann Church. Why was it built? Basically, it's an interesting mixture, a melting pot of nationalities. But one large representation back then was the French Canadians.

How did the French Canadians get here? They'd been here since the mill started. A lot of them came from New Brunswick, which was the stomping grounds of a guy named Andrew A.B. Hammond. The Hammond brothers ran this mill for the first 15, or 12 years of its existence. And they were not French Canadian. They were Canadian, but right across the line from Maine. In fact, Hammond's ancestors were Loyalists during the Revolutionary War. And when George Washington took Yorktown, a lot of the Loyalists fled across the border to Canada. And in fact, if I remember right, the Governor of Canada, of New Brunswick, opened up land for these Loyalists. And that's where both Hammond's paternal side and maternal side settled right across the St. John River from Maine.

[00:35:28] With that said, he was not French and he was not Catholic. The Hammonds were not. And I should throw in here, while A.B. was the famous one of the Hammond brothers, it was Henry Hammond, his younger brother, I think, who actually ran the mill. And George Hammond, another brother, who was in charge of the woods operations. This was all during the 1880s and 1890s. They're the ones that got their hands dirty. But they did grow up in the logging camps back in New Brunswick and Maine, and they knew that the French Catholics were good rivermen and good in the woods. And so when the mill began here, that was the pipeline for a lot of those people who were in destitute times back then.

So short story long, that's how the Catholics got here. It's interesting that over the years now our parish and our diocese here in Montana has a large Butte Irish Catholic influence. Would you agree, Father Poole? We have, since we became a parish of our own in 1940, we've had ten pastors. And five of them came from Butte. And with names like O'Sullivan and Noonan. And one of them came from Anaconda, Father Morley. Essentially we're fed by the Butte Catholics, the Butte-Irish side of the Catholic equation. But, back then it was French and most of the masses in the early days were said in French. In fact, I think all of them were in French clear into the 1920s.

When the church was built in 1905, it was built by St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit church in Missoula, and they served us on a monthly basis for just the first two or three years. Then we were turned over, as St. Francis grew, we were turned over to Frenchtown, St. John's in Frenchtown, largely because of their connections with the French and the French language. And so from 1908 until 1923, when we were absorbed by the new St. Anthony Parish in Missoula, Father Lionel Legris would come out here every month and say Sunday Mass.

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** I've got a question about your timeline for the building of the church because my folks, my dad and my grandfather, helped build the church. My folks were married in 1920 in Frenchtown at St.

John the Baptist. Then, I had three older brothers, my youngest was 14 when I was born in '41. They helped build the wooden church that burned in 1966, '67. Because I was married there in '64. And my father always talked about how he and my two brothers and his father, we were Cyrs, helped build the wooden church.

They had a building out to the side that's still there, I think, that they used for a church, and it belonged to the school. But the school let us, let the Catholics, use that building for a church. And that's the first church, the wooden church is the second church, and this church is the third one.

(fade in scene in recording)

**Kim Briggeman:** We and the Lutherans are both on our third church and both of us have suffered a fire.

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** You were talking about Sunday School, er summer school. The Catholics would have their summer school one week and the Lutherans would have it the next week. And the kids would go to each. (audience reacts. Overtalking)

[00:40:20] **Kim Briggeman:** If you want to glance over your shoulders on the back wall right here we have the dedication of the second church which was 1940 and they didn't tear down most of the first church. The 1905 church still stands right next door here turned towards the school.

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** My folks had to get married in Frenchtown because that wasn't big enough for a wedding.

**Kim Briggeman:** Ah. They said they had to fit the weddings in Frenchtown and the funerals in Bonner. I don't know why that was. (laughter)

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** And the first mill in Milltown was the last mill across the river. At the end, you know where the old bridge is? It was along the riverbank 'cause my grandfather Walter worked there.

**Kim Briggeman:** In 1886?

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** They moved here in 1916. My dad was born in 1898 and my mother was born in 1900. And my grandfather went to work there and my grandmother, his wife, lived in what they called Lothrup. She had a bed and breakfast, now we call 'em, but it was a boarding house.

**Kim Briggeman:** We're gonna have to get you a microphone and your name. (audience reacts. Unclear comments) Well, I appreciate that. This is bein' filmed, and this is a historic recording of events so the information that everybody is sharin' we hoping will be archived and used in later.. Yes..

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** Well, my maiden name is Cyr.

**Kim Briggeman:** OK. We've got a question here.

**Jim Labbe:** (unclear – gets microphone) when her family was here and all that..

**Kim Briggeman:** This is Jim Labbe, right?

**Jim Labbe:** Right. Anyway, my grandparents got to Milltown probably in the 1890s sometime, I'm not sure, but I know my dad was born in the old Doucette house February 14, 1900. The house that burned down here. My dad was also the (unclear) my dad was best man at your mom and dad's wedding.

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** (inaudible)

**Kim Briggeman:** Your dad was Ed? Yeah. Ed Labbe.

**Cliff Iverson:** Cliff Iverson again. The lady just mentioned the Lothrup area. If you have never read the book, there's one about Lothrup, Montana and Petty Creek. The Western Mill over on the other side of the Blackfoot came from Lothrup, Montana, most of that equipment from there. My grandfather worked there... I was born in 1933 and he was there prior to that and living in Milltown so there's a lot of history between Bonner, Milltown and Lothrup.

**Kim Briggeman:** And Lothrup was the Western Lumber Company and Western Lumber Company, you get back to Senator William Clark – dam, streetcar system. Western Lumber Company at Lothrup moved its operation to West Riverside where Town Pump is now in 1910-1911. So at about the time all this other stuff was goin' on in Bonner, we got a second mill just downstream from the first one. I might divert here just a little bit because I keep comin' up with W. A. Clark who was in some ways the villain of Montana and a senator. But in 1905, the year that this church was built, William Clark was, among other things, building the dam here in Bonner, he was a US Senator, had been since 1901, this time he was elected legitimately, apparently. So he was doin' his Senator thing.

[00:45:02] He was also in the midst of building the mansion that you may have heard of on Fifth Avenue in New York City. I think it was completed a couple of years later, but it was so ostentatious with 141 rooms, a swimming pool, on and on, that the people in New York just laughed at it. It was “Clark’s folly,” they called it. But he was buildin’ that mansion, he was a senator, he was buildin’ the dam and he almost died of a brain tumor that summer. He was in a New York hospital getting operated on and a couple of months before that, he and his brother were laying out a town site along their railroad in Nevada that was stretchin’ from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles. They and a partner were laying out a town site on a ranch called the Las Vegas Ranch. And that town, of course, became Las Vegas in Clark County, Nevada. Clark had a lot of irons in the fire and remained that way until 1925. But he basically was out of Montana after 1907.

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** ..Legendary Lodge on Salmon Lake.

**Kim Briggeman:** Right.

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** He had a lookout up on the mountain above it where they have a cross now. Because he was waiting for the revenuers, watching out for the revenuers.

**Kim Briggeman:** Now we really need to get you on the microphone. So his cabin, I guess it was, on Salmon Lake is now owned by the Catholic diocese. It’s called Legendary Lodge. A summer camp for youth that we may get into in our youth category here.

I think I’m gonna leave it at that. I had some more stories about Father Lionel Legris who was essentially a character unto himself and he had a car which set him apart from most people. John Moe, in a little history forum we had here in 2005, remembered Father Legris driving his buggy, basically his motorized buggy from Frenchtown at top speed. Sometimes he got it stopped, sometimes he didn’t. But he’d pull in to the parking lot here which was all dirt or in this case, mud. He’d come in and he’d say mass. He’d go outside and, in the mud, he’d pick up the front end of his car, turn it towards Frenchtown and take off back to Frenchtown. (laughter) Lots of Legris stories. Lionel L-e-g-r-i-s.

Uh, Jim back here.

**Jim Habeck:** One question for you, Kim.

**Kim Briggeman:** Hold on. We’ll get a microphone for you.

**Jim Habeck:** You can answer this, I think.

**Kim Briggeman:** This is Jim Habeck.

**Jim Habeck:** Jim Habeck from First Presbyterian Church, the founding of Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It* and I’ll stop there. But, Kim, you can answer the question. People have mentioned, I see the backs of everybody who’s talking, about getting married and being born. What’s the third part? Dying and being buried. So where’s St. Ann’s former occupants? Was there any land dedicated any place within a quarter mile of where I’m standing where people are buried? Because they weren’t cremating back then, were they? Maybe they did.

**Kim Briggeman:** I don’t think the Anaconda Company was unto cemeteries. That’s my theory, I mean, they.. Uh, it’s not a revenue maker. (laughter) So all of our Bonner – we’ve been buried elsewhere. In the case of the Catholics, a lot of ‘em in St. Mary’s cemetery in Missoula. And there’s other people that know more about that than I do.

OK. It’s time now to turn to the next phase of our thing and this is where you guys will really help out.

[00:50:00] **Carl Rohr:** O.M. Grimsby was the pastor from ’21 to ’32. And you said ’27 you were lookin’ for? Name was O.M. Grimsby and he was at St. Paul and served out here in Bonner as well. (audience inaudible) You’re welcome.

I’ve always, when I think about church and church buildings, I always want to say church is not a building. Church is a people. And I remembered an old song that the kids used to sing about “I am the church, you are the church, we are the church” and I couldn’t remember one word. “The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a something place, the church is a people.” And so I went online and, believe it or not, that little song that the kids used to sing was in there. It’s amazing what you can find on the internet. But it’s “the church is not a resting place, the church is the people.”

When I was in Post Falls, Idaho our church burned on New Year’s Day and I remember that so well and we were thrown into a period of time when we had no church building for several months. Probably close to six or eight months. And I always look back on that time as the “strong time” for the church because we didn’t have the building to hold us together and we, that we could rely on coming together. My office was in a grocery store and we met in one of the schools and we met in homes for this and that, and I think the people just came

together and pulled together in a way that they didn't do when we had our building. Now, having said that, I recognize that our buildings are important to us and they're the place that we as congregations call home. They're the place where the community gathers, so I just want to say something about the buildings that Our Savior's has had to give you some idea of where we have been and then, I don't know, Kim, if you're gonna say something about your buildings or not but some of you may.

In March of 1909 the decision was made to build a building for Our Savior's Lutheran Church. And the contract was let in 1910 in the spring and the building was dedicated later that year in October. So from sometime in March until October, this building was put up at the cost of \$1,800. That building sat, if you look at the present garage of the parsonage, right adjacent to that, in fact I think the garage shares a wall foundation with the old foundation for that church building. And it's still there and through the years it's been filled with roots and tree trunks and all that so when I was here that was all decaying and beginning to sink. And we kept putting truckload and truckload of fill in that place and it just kept sinking more every year until finally we decided, you know, we've done the best that we could with the fill. We planted those trees. (audience suggests tree name inaudible) Aspen, thank you, I wanted to say birch, and I know that [isn't right]. We planted aspen so people wouldn't run through that area, and break their legs because the ground was just so uneven. So our little aspen forest came as a result of that.

But that church was on land provided by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. And then on August 27th of 1932, the fire occurred that destroyed that building. Marie Lein wrote that she was pretty sure that some fellows were drinking, and went into the building next door, built upon a fire on the floor, and it spread.

I remember her talking at a meeting that Glenn Smith wanted to have. It was early on when I was here, and Glenn was writing an article for the newspaper at the mill about the history of the churches, and so we gathered anybody who wanted to come from our congregation and sat one evening and listened to stories, amazing stories, that people shared with one another. And Glenn wrote a wonderful article. I'm sure that's archived some place on the internet, I'll bet. Yeah, you could look it up. Do you know where you'd look it up?

[00:55:12] **Glenn Smith:** Not on the internet, but we do have it in our history center.

**Carl Rohr:** Okay. 'Cause that, should be treasured. But at that meeting, Marie Lein was there and she could remember, she was quite young at the time, but she remembers coming with her family because the word got out that the fire was raging. And she said, "And from afar, all we could see was the bell in the bell tower glowing red." She said, "It was just unbelievable, lit up."

So that building ended in 1932, but they made a decision to... let me say a couple other things about that building while I'm there. Somehow they were able to save the furniture. The altar, the painting behind the altar, and the altar rail, through people from the congregation and community people who came together and they got that furniture out. And I can remember early on in my ministry, Clara Madsen wanted to re-carpet the kneeling pad on that altar rail because it was so important to her. And it was now in the basement of the church with the old altar. So she saw to it that it was re-carpeted. And I think it was the Lent right after that we decided to have our Lenten services in the basement of the church and use that old altar rail and altar. And I was just amazed watching some of the older people in the congregation, for whom those memories were quite vivid, with tears in their eyes, re-experiencing this community that had come from so long ago.

September 21, 1932, they decided to rebuild not long after the building had been burned. The price this time was \$6,400. A big jump. It was built on the same foundation that the old one had been built on and so the walls from that are still to be found over there. This was during the Depression and the men were only working one day a week, a lot of them. So, they pitched in and did a lot of hands-on work in this building. And community members too chipped in and it was a joint effort. There was a lot of support in the community, a lot of support from the mill, and this building was constructed and raised.

The third building came just as a result of outgrowing the old building, the second building, and ground was broken for that in March of 1965, this time [the cost was] up to \$30,000. The church raising, they had a specific day, and on May 2nd of '65, they began to worship in the church on November 7th, and the old building was later moved to Clinton, where it became part of the Clinton Community Clubhouse.

And they dedicated the building that exists now in June of 1966. The addition to that building began on Pentecost Sunday in 2006. That was my last Sunday before I retired. And we had a real celebration, and we ended the service by going out and breaking ground for the new building, and then I said, "Goodbye! Do a nice job!" (Laughter) Warren Hampton was serving as the architect for the project, and it was a project that was completed and dedicated two years later on Pentecost Sunday. So that's where we are with the buildings.

[00:59:47] I want to mention just something about Hope Baptist since they're not represented here today since Dan was called away. Dan Taylor came to the area in 1991. He was from Texas and a lot of the Baptist churches



in Texas had an outreach ministry where they'd go and start congregations in other places. They came to this area with the idea of starting 14 Baptist churches in our area and Dan held his first service in 1992.

Yeah, I'm going to say this. I think poor Dan coming out of Texas. He had no idea what he was getting in for here in Montana. He worked so hard going door to door to door to door, meeting people and inviting people, and seemingly getting nowhere. I think he just thought the Pacific Northwest was real heathen country. That it was almost hopeless. But he persevered, and he's still here to this day. They began worshipping with us, not with us, but in our building in 1994. And they worshipped on Sunday afternoons, and then in 1996, they bought property over on Zaugg Lane and they, the group from Texas, his folks were still a part of that congregation. They showed up and they had a two or three week building period where they had everything set to go. And they used our building as home base, and they served their meals and cooked their meals out of our building, and then went over and worked over in West Riverside. And they put that building up lickety-split and have been there ever since and Dan continues to serve that congregation.

So that little bit about.. oh, just a couple of things, Art Pine I know was very instrumental in the current building in terms of design and so forth. And my internship congregation in Townsend, Montana, was ultimately Art's design. Same design as this, only it was constructed two-thirds the size. I found that connection with me, too. Things you want to say about buildings? Yes, Warren.

**Warren Hampton:** You didn't mention Reverend [Gerald] Dyste was here during the building of the last church. The one that's standing now. He was better known as the church builder from my parents' side of it. But in the early 60s, he was the one serving our congregation that actually got that built. And as I understand it, as soon as it was built, he was on his way to the next project.

**Carl Rohr:** Okay, Thank you for that. Oh no, he's listed here. Yeah, he was here from '62 to '66. Thank you. Anyone else? Either about the Lutheran Church or the Catholic Church buildings.

**Kim Briggeman:** I would, in relation to the Catholic Church, I would say, when we had our fire in 1985, the 1940 church burned in early 1985. And from that time until this church was finished the Lutherans invited us over to their church as well. Just like Hope Baptist spent two years holding services there, we spent almost two years, a year and a half, for sure. Saturday afternoon or Saturday evening and Sunday morning services thanks to the Lutherans [for] opening their doors.

**Carl Rohr:** Okay, Kim.

**Kim Briggeman:** There are a lot of people here that remember those days. I think Shirley Cuplin was on the building committee or at least the parish council. There's any number of people here. I won't try to identify them all. Jo, yes, Jo Labbe was instrumental in getting us a new church as well.

I don't have anything else exactly on the buildings, but does it stir up any stories? Either the fires or the old churches?

**Ken Peers:** Ken Peers. I was a volunteer fireman at the time, and I'll always remember that coming in here and seeing the building's floors and walls. And I was just looking at the picture there on the corner of the old, of the church. And the front window was, where you go into the front of the church was gone. And I sat with another guy and we poured water over with a three-inch line for two hours in there trying to put that fire out. It was a sad day.

[01:05:31] **Kim Briggeman:** One of my, one of my memories of the 1940 church, it had this beautiful hall downstairs. I've included some pictures here with the knotty pine paneling, etc. That stirs up a lot of memories and even this, you can still smell it, in a way. I graduated from Bonner School in eighth grade in 1970, and for whatever reason, the superintendent, Leo Musburger at that time, didn't let us have school dances at the school.

And so our eighth grade graduation dance, "Hey Jude," and all, "House of the Rising Sun," that was downstairs in this church before it burned down. And a lot of people got married here. A lot of people in this crowd got married in that church. Bev.

**Bev Frolich:** I brought a picture of the last mass, Christmas mass, that we had in our old church. And I don't know if you have a picture of that, but I would certainly like to dedicate it, or give it, if you don't have one. Father Tom Gannon was the priest then, and I remember we all wondered, "Oh, where is Father Gannon?" And he just happened to have been gone that night. So he wasn't here when that...

**Kim Briggeman:** He was at a funeral in Butte.

**Bev Frolich:** He was at a funeral in Butte. So that was wonderful. And I just want to give my thanks to the Lutheran Church also for opening up their doors and [being] so gracious with hospitality, inviting us over there

for those two years. Which we also had our CCD down in the basement. And so we used the whole church, truthfully, and I just want to tell you how much we appreciated that.

**Kim Briggeman:** There are some pictures up here of...

**Unknown speaker:** What caused the fires?

**Kim Briggeman:** The official word in the paper, at least, was there was wiring in the ceiling of the basement right in the altar area of the 1985 fire. But, Ann, did you?

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** It was in the furnace. There was some wiring got...

**Kim Briggeman:** It didn't burn the whole thing down.

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** They saved the pews. And they had them refinished, and those are the ones in there. And they were donated originally from St. Anthony's when they got new ones.

**Kim Briggeman:** Oh, from St. Anthony's, the pews were. A lot of the stained glass windows were, not a lot of them, but some of them were destroyed, but some of them were charred. It was almost unrecognizable, and so a few years ago, the ones.. we kept them, and they were refurbished, I guess you'd call it by Tom Conley, who, unfortunately, has died since then. But there's four of them right behind us in the back there on display, a couple more in through the door there in the confessional.

And I was just going to read quickly the names. These were dedicated in the 1940 church. So Mr. and Mrs. Tom Fleming, the Soucie family, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford LaForge, I think is the third one there. And the fourth one is in memory of Gladys Shannon. Lots of stories about those names, those families, but we won't get into those right now. Mr. Habeck.

**Jim Habeck:** I know there's a Piltzville Rural Fire Department right now as we sit here. The question that I have is, was there a period of decades or even a half a century when any fire in this region where the two rivers come together depended on responses from Missoula? No wonder they could have been 30 minutes away from the first truck coming on.

[01:10:10] **Kim Briggeman:** I'm going to say no, we had the Anaconda Company.

**Jim Habeck:** The Anaconda [Company], they were the fire department?

**Audience:** (voicing agreement)

**Ken Peers:** Yes. The fire department had their own pump. They had a pumper, but it only had 500 gallons of water. It didn't go very far. (Kim: say that again) This is Ken Peers. Yes it was the Anaconda Company. They had a pumper that they would run out to the community. But it would have, like I say, a 500 gallon tank on it. And that didn't go very far when you had a fire.

**Jim Habeck:** So when you dialed 9-1-1, what happened?

**Ken Peers:** There was no 9-1-1. (Laughter)

**Kim Briggeman:** That was Cliff's phone number. (Laughter)

**Jim Labbe:** Talking about fires and all that, it was probably in the mid-1950s, there was a grass fire that started over here where the old Anaconda dump was. It burned down two or three houses over there as I remember. And the Missoula Fire Department brought a water tender out and a couple of fire trucks. I remember they were hooked to the fire hydrant there in Milltown. I know they were on that fire.

**Kim Briggeman:** There is talk of one of these Roundtables next year being on the fires of Bonner or even the crimes of Bonner. (laughter) Lots of good stories.

**Jim Habeck:** The sentiment of my thoughts was whether the residents themselves were volunteer firemen.

**Kim Briggeman:** Very much so. There's stories in our history book of the Finnish women manning the pumps on fires. They were very much involved in any fire in Milltown. We're talking different eras. The Anaconda Company was the main founder of the BFPA, the Blackfoot Fire Protective Association, that fought the forest fires around here for, I don't know, 70 years, until the state took over.

**Cliff Iverson:** Cliff Iverson again. In 1946 the school caught fire and the Company sent men and equipment out there. Mrs. Dufresne, I was in the seventh grade, and she saw Tony Petrov comin' through the weeds. He wasn't very tall. But she saw him comin' and knew there was a problem. In regards to the one Jim Labbe talked about, there was an older Norwegian gentleman by the name of Nels Abramson, but they called him Big Nels. He was

probably 6'4" or something like that. Took out several..I think Rick [Swanson], didn't your folks live at the end of that area there?

**Kim Briggeman:** We're gonna speed things up. We're probably runnin' overtime here. We've still got a couple of categories here we want to hit, I think unless everybody's ready for pasties. We did want to talk a little bit about the youth and children in our churches in Bonner and just a little anecdote. Again, this was from John Moe, the former sheriff in Missoula County. I think most of you recognize the name. He grew up here. He was around when Father Legris was serving us and he said, among other things, he helped his grandfather (gets confirmation from audience member) Vital Cyr – it's one of those windows that are dedicated. Yes. He stoked the fire before Mass, before Father Legris got here. This would have been in the 1920s. He said, "I was an altar boy and, of course, the Mass was in Latin." So once we got rid of the French (laughter) we didn't go to English, we went to Latin until Vatican II in the '60s. "And I remember my greatest desire was to ring the bell. So we'd ring the bell and (attempted Latin phrase) or something like that as an altar boy. Otherwise I didn't understand what was going on and neither did anybody else." (laughter)

[01:15:59] So, questions? Anything as youth, which we all were at one time, in relation to any of the churches in Bonner? Lots of youth groups. Lots of that kind of thing.

**Jennifer Alexander:** My name is Jennifer Alexander. And I remember when the church burned and mom got the phone call and I very vividly remember her getting the phone call and then after that I remember going over to Our Savior's and CCD in the basement. I went down there recently and it's so small! But back then it was so big. We had Vacation Bible School over there. A lot of things. And then I was one of the first communion students in the first church. We had the first, in this church, we had the first communion class and that was pretty fun. And going to Legendary Lodge all those years. A lot of times with help from this parish and my daughter was baptized here, I was baptized here, my sisters and brother were baptized here, and my mom was married here. So, I don't know, a lot of history.

**Kim Briggeman:** Can we identify your mom?

**Jennifer Alexander:** Toni LaBelle

**Kim Briggeman:** The LaBelle family moved here when US Plywood came in. Early 70s. (Interruption in recording).

**Charlotte Alonis:** I'm Charlotte Hampton. I was a member of the first confirmation class at Our Savior's in the new building. My brother Warren was a member of the last confirmation class in the old building and we have really good memories growing up of Pastor Anderson coming to our house to visit our grandmother who lived with us. (laughs) He never really called first and he always came for tea and I just remember mother always in a flurry 'cause she'd get: "Oh no! It's Pastor Anderson" and (unclear) look a little bit better. But you asked about memories as a youth growing up. None of us kids really liked to drink church Kool Aid. It always smelled funny. (laughter) It's just like, "Oh no." It just smelled funny and then years later – I was long gone from this area but we learned about the contamination in the wells and then the arsenic. And then, you know, we had all these, like the men would always do Easter breakfast, I just remember all of us running up and down the stairs in the old church and then there was one of Lefty Pleasant's boys, he threw up at every church meal. (laughter) You could just count on that.

**Kim Briggeman:** Lefty, are you here? We're runnin' overtime already and we wanted to say a little about the arts and music category so if we could move on to that. There's so much more on the youth that we could talk about, but unfortunately..

**Carl Rohr:** I'll be brief. Arts and music plays such a huge role, I think, in the church. The Lutherans have often been called "the singing church" and we do love to sing and as Garrison Keillor always reminds us, "We love to sing in harmony." And we love things that help us understand our faith a little better and art has a way of doing that. In a smaller congregation, I think a lot of times we have to make our own art and make our own music because we can't afford to hire someone out to do that. So I think a lot of us in smaller congregations do that. I just want to tell one story about a Lent that we did here. We decided we were going to center our theme around the Cross and we invited everybody from the congregation to bring in crosses that they might have hanging in their homes 'cause a lot of people do that. Or a piece of jewelry or something and we hung it all around the sanctuary. And it was quite splendid to have all of these different things and people would look at those and say, "Oh, that's mine" or see what other people had brought.

[01:20:03] Then that same year I asked Norman Jacobson about the possibility of doing – if you don't know Norman Jacobson's photography, you're missing something. He's an amazing, amazing man and talented and creative. So, months ahead of time he started taking pictures of crosses around the community and we had picked a different theme for each Wednesday night during Lent and he took pictures of crosses that fit that

theme. And it was absolutely amazing when we came together. And he took lots of those pictures. (asks Norman) Do you remember how many? It was hundreds. But it was just an amazing way to center our thoughts. And then the other thing we did that year in terms of this cross theme. I can't remember for sure who made it, but someone fashioned a huge cross out of telephone poles and put it together. And it was heavy. And we had it laying on the floor in the center of the building. And we gathered around it for worship. And that was that year.

Then, the next year we weren't going to use it inside, but I remember we thought, "Oh, it'd be nice to have by the front door as people come in." And I remember carting that thing around on my shoulder. I thought, "If people ever see this, they're going to think the crucifixion is happening all over again." (laughter) It weighed a ton, but I had to drag it around the building to the front door. So that was homemade art, and I think homemade art serves us well.

In terms of music, there's a story I want to tell too. Sometimes we would bring in people to perform or to lead worship and so forth, although we had a lot of talented people in the congregation. One year, it was in '93 or '94, there was a German choir coming through and they asked about the possibility, I don't know how we hooked up with them, but they asked about the possibility of our hosting a concert in the building. And so we agreed that we would host this concert. And they came, there were 35 of them or something, and they were really wonderful well-trained musicians. And we held their concert at, I don't know, 7:00, 7:30. And, Carl hadn't thought to find out about.. You know the train that used to come back and forth and the parsonage it seemed like it was that far from the train track.

So when it came, it rattled. And the church as well. They sang their concert, and all of a sudden they began to sing a song called, an old spiritual called, "I hear the train a comin." (laughter) And I heard the train a comin' off in the distance and it came and got louder, until finally they had to quit singing. So, we just stood there and waited for the train to get through its loading and unloading, and then they picked up and continued their concert.

You may have stories that deal with art and music, and you're welcome to share them, but that's all I'm going to say in the interest of time. Anybody? (Aside to Kim) They heard the word pasty. Anybody want to make any closing remarks on any of these areas about the church as the center of our community? The church and the school and the mill. Yes?

**Ann (Cyr) Copenhagen:** I remember one time I read an article in the Missoulian and it said, Bonner. Everything was Bonner. And I'm going, "Huh, I thought West Riverside was where the convenience store is. Milltown is where you cross the bridge, and when you go across the railroad track you're in Bonner. When you go the railroad track the other way, you're in Piltsville." So I called them up and I told them, "You guys gotta look on a map. Bonner isn't all this out here."

**Carl Rohr:** Yes. We have more communities squeezed in here than...

**Kim Briggeman:** You don't know how many times that comes up as a point of conversation in the news media around Missoula.

**Bob Pfister:** I'm Bob Pfister from over here for the last eight years or so. We thank you so much for putting this on. We really appreciate it. Some of the older members of our congregation, when they get going, like Lois Johnson here, she has told me the stories of the Luther League and how great an organization they had going at that time.

I encourage each of you in your own churches here to schedule time with your own congregation, to get your elder members of the church to share memories with the whole church. I think it'd be a neat thing to do in your individual churches. But thank you very much for putting this on today. (applause)

(Outro music and credits)



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