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Don Moore of Ganther Construction pushes a dolly July 20 loaded with material that was moved from a riser in the sanctuary at Most Blessed Sacrament's St. Mary's site. Rick Standrik and Al Hollis Jr. walk out with him to dispose of the materials. During renovations crews have found coins, a prayer book and a rosary lost in 1961. JOE SIENKIEWICZ/OF THE NORTHWESTERN

## St. Mary's renovations uncover child's lost rosary



Nancy Richter, right, holds the rosary she lost in 1961 as a child during Mass at St. Mary's Church on Merritt Avenue. Her sister-in-law, Linda Lett, bookkeeper at Most Blessed Sacrament parish, returned it to her Monday after it was found during renovations at the St. Mary's site. ERIN WASINGER/OF THE NORTHWESTERN

By Erin Wasinger  
of The Northwestern

**N**ancy Richter knew exactly where her rosary was: in the heater at St. Mary's Church, 19 rows from the back; right-hand side. She just couldn't get to it.

Ever since she'd dropped it as a child during Mass in the summer of 1961, she'd remembered.

"How many people can say they know where their (First Communion) rosary is after 50 years?" she said, laughing. "I never forgot."

"It was so, so hot that day," she said.

"Leaning against the wall there were heaters on the side, with holes on the top and bottom. I remember thinking I could drop it down one hole and get it at

the bottom."

Only it didn't come back out. She tried to retrieve it; later asked a nun for help.

"It can't be done," Richter said. "That's what she said." The nun had explained all the pews would have to be taken out to get to the rosary.

Incidentally, that's exactly how Richter's rosary was able to be found earlier this month.

The Gothic Revival-style church at 605 Merritt Avenue is undergoing renovations that will see its heating system, which was in pipes under pews, change to vents on the wall. New pews are being installed, using the old pews' endcaps with their classic Gothic design.

Renovations of the 1892 structure have uncovered a few surprises. Workers found a prayer book from the mid 1920s and "a bunch of coins," including at least one from the 1800s. The parish expects to have them appraised and then put into the church's archives, said

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Nancy Richter lost her First Communion rosary two weeks after she received the sacrament in July 1961. The rosary was found during renovations to St. Mary's Church in Oshkosh earlier this month. SUBMITTED PHOTO

### ONLINE

See more photos from the St. Mary's renovation at [www.thenorthwestern.com](http://www.thenorthwestern.com).

### Rosary

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Tom Donovan, business administrator at Most Blessed Sacrament.

And workers found Richter's rosary, right where she remembered.

On Monday, the shiny, intact rosary was returned to the Van Dyne woman by Most Blessed Sacrament's bookkeeper and Richter's sister-in-law, Linda Lett, in the parish office on High Avenue.

Richter ran her fingers over the pink prayer beads for the first time in 51 years.

"They have no idea what this meant to me to get this back and to have this day come," she said later about the workers and the parish, whom she asked to keep an eye out for it as renovations began.

She said she'd never been concerned about the rosary's condition — "What better place (could it be) than in God's hands?" — but now she's grateful for the chance to pass the rosary and its story to her granddaughter.

She'd received it for her First Communion in July 1961; she lost it about two weeks later. Her parents never knew how it

came to be lost.

"I lied," she said. "I told my mom a girl behind me stole it" during Communion. She laughed Monday when she said there of course had been no little girl.

In addition to changes to the heating system, St. Mary's floor will be replaced and asbestos removed. A new altar and podium for Liturgy of the Word will be made. The "great big podium" will stay, Donovan explained. A handicap ramp will be added to one side.

A permanent baptismal font, big enough for families to gather around, will replace the church's mo-

bile font.

The changes are all part of a plan to "enhance the celebration of the Mass," Donovan said.

No public fundraising was needed for the \$750,000 project; it was paid for by "very good people in town" who specifically set aside funds for this purpose, Donovan said.

Renovations began in June. The 800 or so parishioners, who are now meeting at St. Peter's, can expect to be sitting in the new pews by late September.

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