

DAKOTA IMAGES

Martin Marty, who oversaw the establishment of the Catholic Church in South Dakota, was born Alois Marty in Schwyz, Switzerland, on 12 January 1834. The oldest of eleven children, he attended a Jesuit school in Schwyz, where he showed a talent for music. After the Jesuits were driven out of Switzerland in 1847, Marty attended the Benedictine college at Maria-Einsiedeln, Switzerland. He entered the Benedictine Order in 1854 and took the name Martin in honor of the patron saint of Switzerland. He was ordained in 1856 and taught modern languages at the College of Einsiedeln until 1860.

In order to minister to German-speaking settlers in the United States, missionaries from Maria-Einsiedeln purchased a tract of land in Indiana where they established the new monastery of Saint Meinrad. Due to its location and lack of resources, the monastery struggled to survive. In the fall of 1860, the twenty-six-year-old Marty volunteered his assistance and left Switzerland for the United States. Five years later, the monastery gained the rank of abbey, and Marty became its first abbot.

In 1876, Marty left Indiana for Dakota Territory, fulfilling an ambition to carry out Father Pierre Jean DeSmet's plan to establish a mission among the Sioux Indians. Marty's arrival also coincided with the Great Dakota Boom, which brought thousands of non-Indian settlers to eastern Dakota. In 1880, Marty was installed as bishop of Dakota Territory. From his see at the territorial capital of Yankton, he sent priests and nuns to several Indian agencies, competing with Protestants for converts and funds to educate Indian children. Catholic missionaries started Saint Francis mission school on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, Holy Rosary Mission and boarding school at Pine Ridge, and the Industrial School for Indian Boys in Yankton.

When South Dakota gained statehood in 1889, Marty transferred to Sioux Falls. From there, he traveled extensively, seeking to visit every Catholic church in the state. During the eighteen years Marty served in South Dakota, fifty-one Catholic churches, sixty-eight missions with churches, and numerous parochial schools were established in the state. The Catholic population, both white and Indian, grew to thirty-five thousand people.

Marty was transferred to the Diocese of Saint Cloud, Minnesota, in December 1894 and was installed as bishop there in March 1895. He died on 19 September 1896, after suffering from poor health for several years.

—Jennifer L. Littlefield



Martin Marty

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