

Our History



SACRED HEART

CATHOLIC CHURCH OF FRESNO, CA

A ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE DIOCESES OF FRESNO



Dear Sacred Heart Parishioners,

Greetings in the Lord Jesus! The Church Directory you hold in your hands tells a story through words and pictures of a family of faith that for fifty years now has responded to God's call and the love of Jesus and become a community filled with the gifts of His Holy Spirit. This "family album" is a wonderful keepsake of this, our Golden Jubilee year. It reminds us of God's blessings in the past and serves as a promise and a hope of all that He still has in store for us. We must give praise and thanks to the Lord!

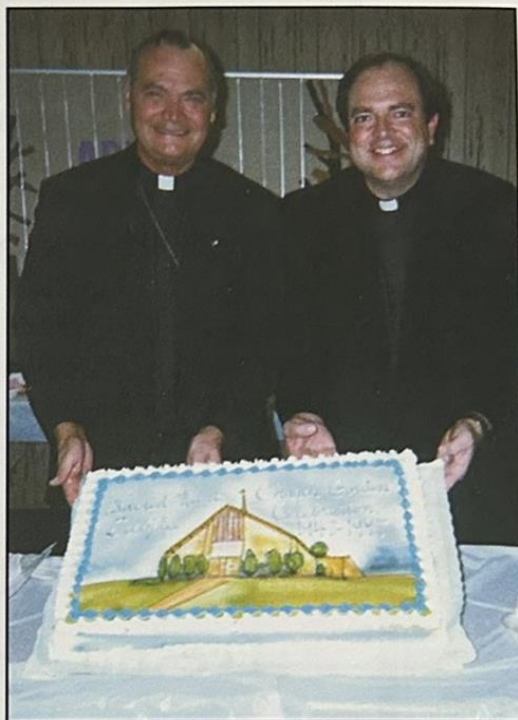
From our humble beginnings in 1947 to this present day, dedicated believers have called Sacred Heart their church, their family, their home. We continue in that spirit today. We pray and worship. We are formed and shaped by God's Word in the Scriptures. We gather at the table of the Eucharist. We welcome new members into our family. We teach and live the values of the gospel through our parish K-8 Sacred Heart School and programs of Religious Education on all age levels. Parishioners actively participate in the life of our church by forming organizations and ministries which unite us socially and spiritually. We celebrate life's precious moments in sacrament through Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation. We rejoice at weddings as couples vow to love each other with the love of the Lord. We comfort our sick and our dying in prayer and anointing and with compassion and hope gather together in God's promise of eternal life when death touches one of our church families.

The above photo reminds us of the joy your Bishop and Pastor share at this wonderful time and milestone moment in our parish history. We thank Bishop John Steinbock for his leadership and service here in our Diocese of Fresno.

So many people - priests, religious and laity - have preceded us and so many will one day succeed us. This parish is not of our own making. We are the Lord's work. My prayer is that God who has begun a good work in us may continue to bring it to completion. The presence of Christ can be found in the spirit of each person chosen to be part of this community. Because we are the Church, the Body of Christ, the faces which appear in this book can in a very real way be considered the "faces of the Lord." Jesus said: *"As long as you did it for one of these...you did it for me."* (Mt 25:40)

This Directory reminds us of how blessed we are in being together. Thank you for your dedication and support. So many of you are involved in ministry and service. Let's continue to pray for each other. With love and prayers, your friend and Pastor,

Fr. Chuck



A BRIEF HISTORY OF SACRED HEART CHURCH

The roots of Sacred Heart Church go back to 1947 when the Most Rev. Aloysius J. Willinger, aware of the growing population in what was then the "northeast" district of Fresno, realized that a new parish would be needed.

Sacred Heart was established as a parish in the fall of 1947 with a membership of approximately 200 families. Rev. Harry Clinch, who would later become Bishop of the Diocese of Monterey, was appointed as the first pastor by Bishop Willinger. Since there was as yet no church building, parishioners first gathered for Mass in the library of San Joaquin Memorial High School on October 5. Mass was soon moved to and celebrated in the newly-completed gymnasium.



Until Bishop Willinger decided on the canonical establishment of a new parish, Catholics in this area belonged to St. John's Cathedral. Since the Cathedral was quite a distance away, however, the establishment of a new parish was imperative. The first step, once parish boundaries were announced, would be a house-to-house census to determine the number of Catholic families in the new parish.

Sacred Heart School began in the fall of 1949 with an initial enrollment of 140 students. Located on the Sacred Heart parish property adjoining San Joaquin Memorial High School, the new

school consisted of two buildings. One contained the administrative offices, nurse's room, kindergarten and first grade classroom. In another unit were the second and third grade classrooms. A third and matching building, designed as classroom space for the school, served initially as the parish church. The principal and third grade teacher was Sister M. Margaret of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph, who conducted the girls' dormitory at San Joaquin Memorial. Others on that first faculty were Sister M. Bernadette, Mrs. Richard Macedo and Miss Jean Waterman.

The celebration of Mass and services in what was also being used for classroom space began to impose hardships on the parishioners. Every week desks had to be removed and an altar erected. After Mass, the room had to be rearranged for classes the next day. Consequently, a





Sacred Heart Chapel with seating for 300 was built. It was also intended as a future unit for the growing school after a permanent church could be built. Pews were built by members of the parish, assisted by Pastor Francis E. Walsh and assistant Rev. Anthony Herdegen. Altar linens, sanctuary hangings and vestments were supplied by members of the church Altar Society. Individual parishioners donated a statue of Our Lady of Providence, Stations of the Cross, tabernacle, crucifix, monstrance, and other sacred vessels. Mass was first offered there on June 5, 1949 but by 1952 it was already too small for the fast-growing Sacred Heart parish.

In March of 1951, property was purchased at the present site on Cedar Avenue. Classrooms from Friant were brought down and a temporary church was established. This building would later be used as a social hall once the new church was built and before its demolition in 1966.

In February of 1952, parishioners planned an Open House and shower in the new Sacred Heart rectory. It was a three-bedroom house and also had two rooms suitable for offices. A special feature was a large basement room that would serve as a parish work room and provide meeting space for small groups. Rev. James A. Murphy, pastor, and his assistant, Rev. Declan Murphy, moved there in March of 1952. Until this rectory was completed, the clergy had resided in the seminary quarters at Ryan Preparatory College.

Father Murphy, a tall, youngish, red-haired, Irish-born priest "out seven years" was in his second pastorate. His enthusiasm for the building of a new church was apparent. He spoke of "new subdivisions...freshly built homes...young married couples...buying homes under the GI Bill...all pretty much average-income people...psychologically, the time and place for a new church...a rapidly-growing area."



Meetings were held in parishioners' homes to discuss a \$100,000 campaign to build a new church. One of these meetings was attended by Father Murphy, John Dalich, co-chairman of the campaign, Mr. & Mrs. Max Reinhart, Mr. & Mrs. Cicero Lotti, Louis Valente, Joseph Manning, Mrs. Robert Algio, William Rankin, Harold Barnes, Mrs. Robert Schleuter, Mrs. Ray Fimbres, Leonard Beneke and Rita Murphy, the pastor's sister. A newspaper account of this meeting states: "Those present seemed rather average Americans as to their economic status, a group representing small business and passably good jobs. They seemed pretty typical of those everywhere who are 'the backbone of a community,' the core of every parish, the dependable hard workers who will head up societies, take census, sing in choirs and run bazaars."

The campaign had been inaugurated on Mother's Day of 1952 and no time limit had been set.

There was to be an annual campaign conducted until enough money had been raised to warrant the onset of construction. It was "simply hoped that \$100,000 could be reached as quickly as possible." A news article stated: "A spot check of the average family wage indicated that each might be able to afford an average contribution of \$1.95 a week to the Building Fund, over and above Sunday plate collections."

By May 15, the first 179 pledges totaled \$10,054. This meant that less than one-fourth of the 750 Catholic families in the parish had turned in their pledges. Father Murphy remained optimistic, as it was the beginning of warm weather and vacations and no one disputed him.



By 1955 more than one thousand people were frequently in attendance at Sunday Masses. Religious Education (CCD) classes had begun in the homes of the parishioners. Church organizations had developed and a choir was formed. In May of that year, Rev. Paul Redmond, the pastor, launched a new \$200,000 fund-raising effort to finance and build a new church which was to seat 730 adults – 660 in the nave and another 70 in Our Lady's Chapel. At that time, the parish was completely out of debt and owned ten acres of

land and a rectory.

Father Redmond's appeal letter included the following: "...we must realize that **WITHOUT SACRIFICE**, there can be no true religion. Giving, therefore, which causes us to make a sacrifice, a gift of our hands and our hearts, belongs to the very essence of religion."

The church building committee enlisted architect James J. Nargis and the plans called for a "modified contemporary" style of architecture. The building would cover more than 9,000 square feet.

Groundbreaking ceremonies for the new church were held in August of 1956 before the final afternoon Mass for the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fathers Redmond, Tejerina and Brzezinski officiated. Vincent Bocchini served as the parish building program chairman. Estimated cost was projected at \$188,000 of which \$70,000 in



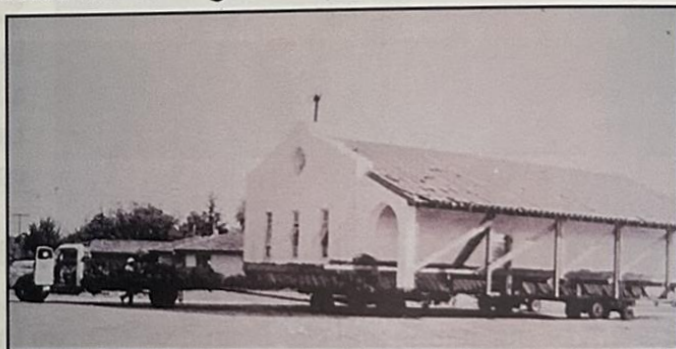
cash had been raised before construction was begun by Louis Nelson & Sons of Selma. The new church was completed and formally dedicated in 1958.



In June of 1960 a 192-square foot mosaic consisting of at least 20,000 pieces of tile was added to the front entrance of the church. Designed and constructed at a cost of \$6,000, the mosaic was given by "friends of the church." The scene is based on the story found in Matthew 8 and Luke 7 and depicts a nine and one-half foot Christ meeting the Roman centurion. Father Redmond stated that he wanted this story to be "a tribute to those who have served our country in the armed forces." Father Redmond was a chaplain with the Marine Corps in World War II. The Latin inscription across the mosaic "Domine, Non Sum

Dignus," is translated "Lord, I am not worthy." Father Redmond explained: "The words ... are said by the priest in each Mass. In this way the faith of the Roman centurion is remembered throughout the world each day". The artwork was designed by John De Rosen of Washington DC, who also created mosaic work for the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The mosaic pieces were produced in Italy and assembled in Los Angeles.

The first units of the new Sacred Heart School were begun in July 1960 at the corner of Rowell and Union. Scheduled for construction were four uppergrade classrooms plus an all-purpose building, two kindergartens and a convent, so that all classes could be transferred to this site from the school rooms still located on the grounds of San Joaquin Memorial High School.



These existing buildings were moved from the SJM grounds to the church property in 1962-63. Landscaping and lawns were put in by the parents of the school children.



The Sisters of the Love of God, who continue to teach at Sacred Heart School to the present day, arrived in September of 1969. That first community included Mother Invention, Sister Luz, Sister Monserrat, Sister Eleanor, Sister Joaquina, Sister Rocio and Sister Conception.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Park was developed by the parish Guadalupe Society in the mid-1970's. It featured tables and benches under a protective shell, restrooms, BBQ-pit and, of course, the shrine and statue of the

Virgin.

In 1976, a Bicentennial window was installed above the church's main entrance and dedicated. It was designed and installed by church members. It features Our Lady, Patroness of the United States, Blessed Junipero Serra, famous California missionary, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, first