

Cathedral Restoration 2000

A Newsletter of Past, Present and Future Parish Renewal

August 1, 1999 – Issue 1



With this newsletter we introduce our Cathedral Restoration 2000 project. During the coming weeks you will learn more about this prominent project and will hear about ways you can become involved.

The newsletter is only a part of the total picture, but it will serve as an helpful means of communication. Watch for it. . . . Read it carefully.

We are about a project that will serve for generations into the third millennium.



- Father Tom Kirk

Restore, Renew and Rejoice

We are on the eve of the millennium. At such epochal moments we tend to think in terms of the larger blocks of the time passed, and open to the future.

Take our church here on the Central Avenue that comes to full view at the end of one of Memphis' most beautiful thoroughfares, Belvedere boulevard.

Immaculate Conception was established by Bishop Thomas Byrne in 1921 in a new area of expansion of the city. Farmlands, pastures and potato fields were transformed in the familiar "suburb."

The housing stock surrounding the church burgeoned to accommodate post-World War I growth. The new residents were achievers. They were productive and attained prosperity. Residents of more modest surrounding neighborhoods were also members. This made for a vibrant, beloved

church that served the people's religious, educational, and social needs.

The parish expanded eastward in the decades from its inception. The church itself was constructed over a ten-year-old domed over crypt that had served as the church. "The upper church," as the parishioners termed it, was built during the depression years. It was dedicated in the summer of 1938.

In the late 1940's the second pastor added all the interior designs you presently see. It was mainly for acoustical reasons. But considerable thought went into the project that should be preserved.

In the 1950's and 60's the third pastor expanded farther eastward by the constructions of the lovely high school buildings. Catholic education has been an integral part of Immaculate Conception from the beginning. We are proud of our schools that span pre-school through the 12th

grade.

Pope Paul VI made Immaculate Conception the cathedral of the newly-created diocese in January, 1971. In the 1970's and 80's the parish adapted to being the mother church of the diocese.

Now in the 1990's the Cathedral Restoration is perhaps the most important of all the developments. The first phase has already been accomplished. The first phase remade Marian Hall, and added the stair gallery so people could easily go down there. Many parish and diocesan events are held there.

The second phase is liturgical in nature. Plans have been in the works for years. The goal is to bring our worship space into conformity with the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council.

I am confident this phase we will soon begin will make this Cathedral church serve its sacred function in a way greater than ever in its history. I think it will be widely acclaimed and well received.



Signs of Hope Made Visible



The child in me still gets a kick out of watching buildings under construction or renovation: houses, ballparks, skyscrapers. I'm glad there are more building cranes in Memphis now than there were when I first arrived a decade ago. This is a hopeful sign. How much more hopeful is a Cathedral church under renovation. The church is always proclaiming renewal in its teaching and liturgy, and physical proof of that renewal in the church facility can do wonders to bolster the invisible renewal always happening within us and around us.

– Father Joe Kerrigan

Environment:

Four Mural Paintings ...

Msgr. Francis D. Grady was named Pastor of Immaculate Conception in 1938, and between then and 1949 the decorations were completed. The plan and design of the decorations is credited to architect George Awsumb, and they were executed by an itinerant German painter named Jack Grue. Little is known of this painter.

The four large murals on the front walls in the transepts are actually oil paintings on canvas. After each painting was completed, it was applied to the plaster surface of the wall. The paintings measure fifteen feet tall by eight feet wide – truly paintings on a grand scale.

It is said that Peter was crucified upside down, and at the far left, in the east transept, is a representation of that event. Note the angel waiting for him in the cloud above. The remaining painting in the east transept shows the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. The river in which Our Lord stands is seen coming out from the mountain of God, and the Holy Spirit is seen descending in the form of a dove. In the west transept, at the far right, is a depiction of the execution of the apostle Paul by the sword of a Roman executioner. The castle seen above is a symbol representing his long imprisonment. The final painting is of the last supper. We see Christ breaking bread with eleven disciples indicating that Judas had already left them on this night of betrayal.

I Remember ...

... the first time I entered the Cathedral.

A new job brought me to Memphis after a previous job came to an unexpected ending. I was feeling especially fragile and insecure during the months while I was looking for new employment. In times of prayer, I often found myself thinking about the Scriptural text "Come, you who labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you." Those words gave me courage when there didn't seem to be much hope.

I was unsure about the move to Memphis since I didn't know anyone and I was really launching into a new career. I wasn't even sure about which church I would attend. I can hardly describe the feeling that came over me as I entered the Cathedral and looked up at the archway, which frames the altar. There were those words that had brought me peace during the months of darkness! "Come, you who labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you." It was almost as if God was saying, "Trust me. I'll be with you in this new venture." I breathed a sigh of relief because somehow I knew that the move to Memphis had been the right thing to do and that my new job would be OK.

That was the day that I began to call the Cathedral "home."

– A parishioner



History:

A New World ...

The Cathedral's history began long before a local diocese was established, a single building on Central Avenue was built, or even a permanent settlement in Memphis existed. As surely as the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers carved the boundaries of West Tennessee, the flow of history shaped its Catholic character.

Soon after Christopher Columbus discovered the New World in 1492, a wave of European explorers descended on the Americas hoping to find gold and great riches. Only 48 years later, Hernando De Soto became the first adventurer to press far enough inland to view the Mississippi from the Chickasaw bluffs. He didn't come alone. Many priests ministered to the faith needs of his small army of discovery near the future Memphis, although without the Sacrament of the Eucharist since the wheat for the altar breads is said to have been destroyed during an earlier battle near what is present-day Mobile.

Tennessee's journey toward statehood began in 1663 when King Charles II of England granted a charter for the colony of Carolina of which Tennessee was a part. Priestly visitors on special missions to the bluffs weren't far behind.

Father Jacques Marquette passed through in 1682 with the explorer Louis Joliet celebrating regular Masses as they went. A Father Boulanger, who traveled with troops up the Mississippi in 1783, is known to have celebrated several Easter-season Masses for those troops at the spot where the Wolf and Mississippi Rivers join. It wasn't the job of the explorers and priests passing through the area to seed permanent settlements, but their faith gradually found fertile ground. As trade was established in the region, settlers moved in.

(Next: Beyond the Frontier)

– Source: "Between the Rivers"