

## A History Time Line of Sacred Heart Parish

Prepared for the Centennial of the Church Building: September 23-24-25, 2022

*“A story of diverse peoples, growing together:*

*One Community of Faith = The Continuous Beating of the Sacred Heart”*

### 1899-1901

**Bishop Thomas S. Byrne**, fifth Bishop of Nashville, Tennessee, established **Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish** as the sixth parish of Memphis, to be located on the southwest corner of Cleveland Street and Jefferson Avenue. It was the first parish located away from downtown, 2.5 miles from the river, and outside the city limits. It was defined by geographic boundaries — North Parkway (n); McLean (e); Peabody (s) and Dunlap (w) — rather than by ethnic background or language. There was growing concern that structuring parishes in immigrant ethnic and language communities — St. Peter’s = English; St. Mary’s = German; St. Patrick’s & St. Brigid’s = Irish; St. Joseph’s = Italian — was impeding the “Americanization” of immigrants and the growth of the Catholic Church.

The original building, dedicated in 1901, housed both the church and a school, staffed by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. **Fr. Patrick Mahoney** was first Pastor.

### 1901-1921

The school grew so much that expansion was needed. Property on the northwest corner of the intersection was purchased for the new church building and rectory. World War I delayed the construction, but the crypt (lower level) was completed in 1913.

Blessed Sacrament Parish was broken off (1912). Immaculate Conception Parish was broken off (1921).

### 1922-24

The church building was completed: three marble altars were dedicated, and the cornerstone was laid. The Silver Jubilee of the founding of the parish was celebrated. The new three-story rectory was built.

### 1926

**Joseph Leppert** was first priest ordained in Memphis, at Sacred Heart Church, which was the home of the *cathedra* for the Bishop of Nashville when he visited Memphis. Forty years later, **Msgr. Leppert** would be a leader in civil rights and de-segregation in Memphis.

### 1930-1951

A new school building was erected in 1930. The last co-ed graduating class of the school was 1945. The Golden Jubilee of the Parish coincided with the 50th anniversary of Ordination of **Msgr. Louis Kempfues**, Pastor from 1929-1963.

### 1951-1971

The crypt (lower level of the church) served as gymnasium and auditorium for grade and high schools until 1966 when a gymnasium was built on Cleveland St, and named for Msgr. Kempfues.

The schools fostered more than 10 priestly vocations, 40 religious sisters, religious brothers, music ministers and prominent citizens.

The crypt facility was also home to the first CURSILLO weekend (which means, “a little course in Christian living”) held in Memphis in 1964. **Fr. James F. McLean, CSP**, and his team hosted 50 men to bring this apostolic movement to West Tennessee. Weekends for women began the next year, and the offices for the movement were housed at Sacred Heart.

The neighborhood around Sacred Heart Church grew increasingly commercial, especially in the area of the medical center, west of the parish. Parishioners moved east, which resulted in a dwindling supply of

grade school children, which, coupled with a shortage of nuns to staff the school, led to the closing of the Grade School in 1968. The High School continued to be operated by the Diocese of Nashville for two more years. In 1970, **Bishop William Adrian**, seventh Bishop of Nashville, made the decision to close the African-American Fr. Bertram High School, located at St. Augustine Parish, merging those students with the girls from Sacred Heart High School, and the boys from the Catholic Boys High School. All these students together formed the co-ed, integrated Memphis Catholic High School on McLean Avenue. Pastors during this time were **Fr. H. J. Shea**, **Fr. Francis McRedmond**, and **Fr. Paul Caldwell**.

### 1971-1988

The Diocese of Memphis was established in 1971. The Sacred Heart High School building, convent and gymnasium became Chancery facilities. **Bishop Carroll T. Dozier**, first Bishop of Memphis, was heavily involved in Memphis' efforts to resettle the first wave of Vietnamese refugees in 1975, many of whom settled in Midtown near the resources of Catholic Charities. A second wave of Vietnamese immigrants came in the 1980s. Vietnamese priests from other Dioceses and parishes were invited to celebrate Mass in Vietnamese periodically, then regularly, at Sacred Heart.

Sacred Heart pastors **Fr. Patrick Lynch**, **Fr. Patrick Heenan**, **Fr. Peter Buchignani**, and **Fr. Thomas Kirk** continued to implement the vision of the Second Vatican Council. The wishes of the parishioners regarding the adaptation of the church building were honored: the "shell" over the pulpit was removed, but the altar railing was kept.

### 1988-2002

The Spanish-speaking population increased in Memphis.

Former Jesuit **Fr. David Knight** was asked by **Bishop Daniel Buechlein**, third Bishop of Memphis, to lead the now inner-city parish, depleted of membership by White Flight. Fr. Knight hired three lay leaders to assist him in the spiritual growth and the ministries of the parish:

**Paul Gray**, Director of Spiritual Formation,

**Judy Gray**, Director of Liturgy and Music, and

**Suzanne Weed Martin**, Director of Hispanic Ministries, which focused greatly on social ministry and outreach. Adult as well as youth faith formation classes were held. Fr. Knight celebrated Masses in Spanish and led CURSILLO weekends in Spanish. Sacred Heart became the "Mother Church" for the Spanish-speaking in Memphis. Annual processions from Sacred Heart to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception to honor Our Lady Of Guadalupe, were begun. Mexican traditions of *Quinceañeras*, *Día De Los Muertos*, *Las Posadas*, and *Los Pastores* were added to parish celebrations. Community-wide celebrations became tri-lingual, with three choirs.

In 1998, Fr. Mike Morgera at Blessed Sacrament Church (with Bishop Terry Steib's permission) allowed another Vietnamese group, who called themselves The Fatima Community, to join Blessed Sacrament Church.

In 1999, the **Centennial of the Founding** of the Parish was observed. The theme of the event, "Three Languages, but ONE Community" was memorialized with an original bi-lingual song composed by parish music minister **Terry Starr**, "One Community of Faith — *Una Comunidad de Fe.*"

### 2002-2012

**Bishop Terry Steib, SVD**, fourth Bishop of Memphis, petitioned his brothers of the Divine Word Missionary order to serve in parishes in Memphis, especially as Missionaries to the diverse community of Sacred Heart. In 2002, (Vietnamese) **Fr. Joseph Dao Vu, SVD**, became Pastor. He was assisted by (American) **Fr. Frank Drzaic, SVD**, (Vietnamese) **Fr. Dominic Nguyen, SVD**, with (Argentinian) **Fr. Miguel Ruiz, SVD**, and (Paraguayan) **Sister Miryan Céspedes, SSps**, to serve those who spoke Spanish.

Tri-lingual Masses celebrated the annual Parish Picnic and TET, the Vietnamese New Year. In 2004, ***Southern Living*** Magazine did a feature story on the TET celebration and Sacred Heart Church. A diverse Youth Ministry was led by **Kristin Fox**, who brought together neighborhood youth from the Sacred Heart neighborhood, learning to work, play and worship with young Vietnamese and Hispanic parishioners.

In 2005, *Manna House*, 1268 Jefferson,— a ministry to the homeless — was founded by SH parishioners **Kathleen Kruczek** and **Peter Gathje**, a result of the ongoing work for Social Justice inspired in Sacred Heart parishioners.

Also in 2005, the Vietnamese community achieved a chapter of TNTT, a Eucharistic Youth Ministry bolstered by Adoration of the Eucharist. Vietnamese choirs, Catholic Mothers' Group and Men's Group were prospering.

### **2012-2022**

In 2012, **Fr. Simon Hoang, SVD**, was named Pastor. With much prayer, the two Vietnamese communities were re-united into one, worshipping at Sacred Heart. Vietnamese Sisters studying in the United States began to visit Sacred Heart each summer, teaching religion and language classes with Vietnamese children.

Much time, skill, and resources were put into caring for the buildings. The garage was renovated into a kitchen and a meeting area; the old St. Vincent de Paul Soup kitchen building was remodeled into a new rectory; additional land was purchased and paved for parking. The basement crypt was restored to its original large open meeting space, its kitchen renovated and a men's bathroom added.

**Jose Magaña** became the Director of Religious Education, tending to the enrollment of 150-200 children and teens each year. Classes were held all over the campus and even across the street in the Dozier House building that had once been the Sacred Heart convent.

In 2019, the Church was closed temporarily due to the Covid pandemic, then opened again to the brave few, thanks to dedicated Ministers of the Environment who disinfected the church after every gathering. The Church was closed suddenly again following a fire in the Sacristy on May 8, 2021. Masses were celebrated at other churches: sacraments at Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Pentecost outside in the street in front of the Fed Ex Forum with St. Patrick's parishioners. Ongoing for a year, English Masses were celebrated in the dining room of the Office Building, and Vietnamese and Spanish Masses at Blessed Sacrament Church.

Community-wide celebrations for the Installation of new Pastor **Fr. Brandon Nguyen, SVD**, and the farewell to departing Pastor Fr. Simon, were celebrated in a huge tent in the parish parking lot.

**Maria Le** was named Director of Religious Education.

Catholic Charities built a community garden, park and resting space to serve residents of the neighborhood, on the land where the Kemphues Gym once stood.

Repairs completed, the Church was rededicated by **Bishop David Talley**, sixth Bishop of Memphis, on June 20, 2022.

On September 8, 2022, the original *cathedra* from Sacred Heart was dedicated in its new home at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

Events marking the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sacred Heart Church building include Friday evening Adoration, Tri-lingual Rosary on Saturday evening, and Sunday Mass. Events include the song, "One Community of Faith," composed for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the parish founding, with a new verse in Vietnamese, composed by Fr. Brandon. Festivities following Mass include a documentary history of the parish, and an outdoor *fiesta* with food and entertainment, including music by the Christian Brothers High School Band, which had performed at the dedication of the original church building in 1901.