

**Centennial Celebration of Sacred Heart Church
1922 - 2022**

**HISTORY OF THE SACRED HEART CHURCH, MEMPHIS
Centennial Celebration of Sacred Heart Church Building
1922 - 2022**

On the centenary of Sacred Heart Church, words from the prophet Isaiah speak to us of the history and future of the people of God. Trusting in God's providence we hear:

See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers.

In August of 1899, Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne, fifth Bishop of Nashville, TN, authorized Rev. Patrick Mahoney, Chaplain of St. Peter Orphanage, to form a new parish, east and outside of the city of Memphis, placing it under the protection of the Incarnate God—the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Church was to be an open witness to the union of the two natures of Christ, in one Divine Personality, our Redeemer, our Hope and our Salvation.

In the first years of the parish Father Mahoney resided at St. Peter's Orphanage and parish Masses were offered in the chapel there. In November 1901, the cornerstone of school and church was laid on the southwest corner of Cleveland and Jefferson in the presence of many religious and civic leaders of the city, with music provided by the Christian Brothers High School band. The lower portion of the building was used for school purposes, under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, KY.

By 1911, the attendance at the school grew so much that it was clearly evident the Church would need a separate building. A subscription program began, and by 1913 the lower part of the new Church—the crypt—was ready for services on the northwest corner of Cleveland and Jefferson, the site of the present church.

Plans to complete the superstructure were hindered by the start of WWI. But the stream still watered the desert, and after an energetic campaign to raise the money, the three marble altars were consecrated on Sept. 19, 1922, and the cornerstone was installed on September 28 of the same year.

It was a large elaborate church with Franz Mayer stained glass windows imported from Munich, Germany. The altars, pulpit and altar railing, and holy water fonts were of Carrara marble imported from Italy. Total cost of the Church and furnishings was \$180,000. Best of all, it was paid for. The parish had no debt. In 1924, a new rectory was built just west of the Church and the old rectory on the southwest corner was refurbished to serve as the convent for the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, who staffed the school.

The 25th anniversary of the parish was celebrated in October of 1924 with a solemn High Mass. Nashville Bishop Alphonse Smith acted as principal celebrant. Father Mahoney was invested with the title of Monsignor. Unfortunately, he lived only five more years, dying from a gangrene

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infection caused by a fall. In 1929, Father Louis. J. Kemphues became pastor, and served for 34 years until his death in 1963.

Ministries were established to give life to the parish. Under the leadership of the assistant pastor Father Thomas Nenon, Boy Scout Troop 49 was organized in 1925, starting the long tradition of scouting in Memphis.

The ordination of Rev. Joseph Leppert and Rev. Eugene Hanafee, the first priests to be ordained in Memphis, on February 2, 1927, led to the speculation that Sacred Heart would be the cathedral if Memphis was named a diocese. A beautiful *ex cathedra* chair was housed at Sacred Heart until it was installed at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Church in 2022.

During Father Kemphues' long tenure as pastor, he set about building a new school structure, a large three-story building with 16 large classrooms and a cafeteria. The school was completed in 1930. The original combination Church-School building was razed, yielding the space for a parking lot. In 1966 a gymnasium was built to the south of the original property. The school served as both elementary and coeducational high school, until the last co-ed graduation class in 1945. Sacred Heart High School then served only girls; boys went to high school in a building at Immaculate Conception until the new Catholic High School was completed on McLean.

Under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, the school flourished in sports, band, and journalism. The debate team was extremely successful with Carol Clasgens winning the Catholic School Champion award.

In April 1951 Sacred Heart Parish celebrated its Golden Jubilee, which coincided with the 50th anniversary of Msgr. Kemphues' ordination. The first edition of the school annual, the Crest was dedicated to the Golden Jubilee. The days from April 21-25, 1951, were filled with much music, drama and ritual. His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch presided at a solemn high Mass with seven bishops and 3 abbots in attendance.

Msgr. Kemphues was a well-known priest in the city of Memphis. His death on May 9, 1963, heralded changes to come for this very large, affluent parish. During the 60's and 70's, the neighborhood grew increasingly commercialized, especially in the developing area of the medical center west of the church. The dwindling enrollment numbers of young children led to the closing of Sacred Heart Elementary School in 1968.

White Flight saw the move of many parishioners to East Memphis. After Msgr. Kemphues' death, a series of pastors served for four or five years each. These included Msgr. H. J. Shea, Father Francis McRedmond, and Father Paul Caldwell. 1970 saw the merger of Memphis Catholic High School, Father Bertrand High School, and Sacred Heart High School to create an integrated and more financially stable structure, with the physical location being at the McLean campus.

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII, had lasted for four sessions, from 1962 through 1965. The result of the Council was the renewal of Catholic life in almost every aspect, from language and theology of the Mass, to the Church's role in the world. The next four

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pastors at Sacred Heart began implementation of the Councils' decrees. Rev. Patrick Lynch, a popular confessor and spiritual director, served from 1971 to 1975. He was succeeded by Father Patrick Heenan, and then in 1979 by Father Peter Buchignani. In 1983, Father Thomas Kirk led the parish in the study of the documents of Vatican II.

The Diocese of Memphis was established on January 6, 1971. The former Sacred Heart School building, convent and gymnasium were renovated for Chancery headquarters of the new Diocese. Bishop Carrol T. Dozier was ordained as the first Bishop of Memphis.

On April 30, 1975, when the communists took over South Vietnam, many Vietnamese fled from their homeland looking for freedom of religion in the United States. Most who came to Memphis settled near the Catholic Charities office, Sacred Heart Church, and a nearby Vietnamese market. In October 1976, Father Vinh Nguyen, who was working at Catholic Charities, celebrated the first Vietnamese Mass in the Catholic charities building. When Father Nguyen left Memphis two years later, the Vietnamese community joined nearby churches.

From 1980 to 1982, a small group of the Vietnamese community invited religious priests of the Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer to celebrate masses during Christmas and Easter.

In 1982-1987, Dominican priest Father Joseph Phi, assigned at Holy Rosary Church, served the Vietnamese community with a weekly 3:00 p.m. Mass at Sacred Heart Church.

In 1987, Bishop Daniel Buechlein asked former Jesuit Father David Knight to return to parish work, to pastor Sacred Heart church, now a parish of 350 families in the inner city of Memphis. Father Knight hired a well-qualified husband and wife team, Paul and Judy Gray, to assist him in parish ministries. Judy served as Director of Liturgy and Music and Paul provided Pastoral Ministry and Adult Faith Formation. As the Spanish-speaking population of Memphis began growing, Father Knight, who spoke Spanish, began to minister to this community. Suzanne Weed Martin was hired to coordinate Hispanic Ministries for Spanish-speakers, providing outreach programs, supporting sacramental formation and social ministries. Sacred Heart became the "Mother Church" of the Memphis Hispanic community.

As Pastor, Father David Knight's focus was on the spiritual growth of the parish, using many of his own theological writings. Father Knight stressed the belief that the Church is the People of God, and is the presence of Christ in the community. He initiated regular parish Masses offered in Spanish and Vietnamese and in addition to English. The Vietnamese community had grown to over 100 families, and Vietnamese priest, Father Anthony Quyet Nguyen, of the Diocese of Mississippi, came to say Mass once a month.

The Hispanic Community grew from approximately 50 to over 500 families attending *La Misa en Espanola* at noon on Sundays. Fr. Knight began Cursillo weekends in Spanish, Mexican traditional celebrations such as *Quinceañeras*, *Día de Los Muertos*, *Las Posadas* and *Los Pastores* were added to parish celebrations. Annual processions from Sacred Heart Church to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe each December were begun.

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Unique Masses were celebrated by the diverse parish community in three languages, with three choirs. For many people all over the city the joy-filled tri-lingual liturgies brought a vivid sense of Pentecost to the neighborhood.

The Vietnamese community provided for the entire Memphis area with the opportunity to celebrate Lunar New Year (TET). Traditional food and dragon dances enriched all of Memphis with the opportunity to learn about their new neighbors.

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.

A diversified youth ministry was led by Kristin Fox. It was comprised of neighborhood youth from the Sacred Heart neighborhood, along with parish Vietnamese and Hispanic young people. These students learned to work, play and worship in a spirit-filled environment.

In 1999, the Centennial of the founding of the parish was celebrated. The theme "Three Languages, but ONE Community" was chosen. To honor the occasion, parish music minister Terry Starr composed a bi-lingual song "One Community of Faith - Una Comunidad de Fe."

In 2001, Bishop Terry Steib, SVD, requested members from the Chicago Province of the Society of the Divine Word to work in the Diocese of Memphis.

Rev. Stan Urdo, SVD, provincial of the Chicago province of the Society of Divine Word Missionaries, contemplated the Mission Statement of Sacred Heart Church:

***Sacred Heart Catholic Parish is a community of diverse people
committed to growing together into the fullness of the Body of Christ
through active participation in the liturgy and deliberate discipleship.
We seek to share Christ's love with those around us
as we share Christ's mission of working for the reign of God on earth.***

The SVD Province agreed to send a team. In June 2002, Rev. Joseph Dao Vu, SVD became Pastor. He was assisted by (American) Father Frank Drzaic SVD, (Vietnamese) Father Dominic Nguyen, SVD, (Argentinian) Father Miguel Ruiz, SVD, and (Paraguayan) Sister Miryan Céspedes, SSpS. This team led the diverse community of White and African-American English-speakers, Hispanics, Vietnamese, and immigrants from multiple countries, including families who came to Sacred Heart as a result of being treated at nearby St. Jude's Hospital.

In 2005, Kathleen Kruczek and Peter Gathje founded Manna House, at 1268 Jefferson, one block west of the church. Manna House continues to provide the homeless a place to have a shower, obtain clean clothes, and get a hair cut.

With the input of lay, clergy, religious women, the community of Sacred Heart continued living its commitment to being diverse peoples growing together into presence of the body of Christ.

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In 2005 Father Joseph began the Vietnamese youth group of **TNTT** (Thiếu Nhi Thánh Thể), with the help of volunteers who graciously accepted the struggles and sacrifice to begin this training. This Eucharistic youth group fosters holiness and apostleship bolstered by Adoration of the Eucharist. In 2022, there are about 50 active members who gather weekly for their formation and activity.

A Vietnamese choir had been founded in 1993 and served at the monthly Vietnamese Mass. In 2015, this choir chose the name “**Holy Family Choir**” because most of the choir members were married couples. Currently there are 30 active members. They faithfully sing at 2nd, 3rd, 4th Sunday Masses of the month under the leadership of director and his colleagues.

The most recent choir, named the **St. Cecilia Choir**, was formed for the younger parishioners to praise God in song. The long tradition of beautiful music at Sacred Heart Church symbolized by the gorgeous stained-glass window of St. Cecilia playing the organ continues ever new.

A chapter of **LMTT** (Liên Minh Thánh Tâm), a Catholic group for men—founded in 1883 by Fr. Edward Hammon, SJ, with the spirituality of “God’s Kingdom Comes”—was established at Sacred Heart in Nov 2018, with 7 members. On Jan. 11, 2019, the first leadership team was formed and celebrated the acceptance of 18 new numbers. The purpose of this group is devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to sanctify oneself, and to live the authentic Christian life in the Family. LMTT chose St. Andre Dung Lac as their Patron Saint, and observe his Feast Day, Nov. 24. The group meets on the first Sunday of the month and serves at the third Sunday Mass. Members of LMTT are men of service in different ministries such as visiting the sick, bringing Eucharist to the homebound and praying with families in the funeral home. Currently, LMTT has 32 active members.

Catholic Mothers’ Group, (Hội Các Bà Mẹ Công Giáo, HCBMCG) had its origins in France in 1850. Its mission was to pray each day with the Virgin Mary and offer their children to the protection of our Sorrowful Mother. The Catholic Mothers’ group at Sacred Heart Church began on Dec. 10, 2017, with 7 members. They meet on the first Sunday of the month. They serve at Mass, pray for special events, are present at funeral homes, visit the sick and retirement homes. Their members serve as Eucharist ministers, Catechists, bring Eucharist to the homebound, and volunteer to help in any fund-raising events. They live their spiritual life by having an annual retreat, and give great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in Adoration. Their uniform is the blue or white traditional Ao Dai and a blue cloth around their neck. They have St. Anne Le Thi Thanh, a Vietnamese mother martyr who was killed in Vietnam, as their patron saint and honor her on July 12. Currently there are 33 active members.

A **Summer School in Vietnamese**, taught by Vietnamese Sisters studying at the Society of the Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa, is offered each summer to Vietnamese children in order for them to learn and treasure their language and heritage. Each day at noon, the children celebrate Mass with songs and prayers in Vietnamese.

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Most of the **Vietnamese acolytes** are young people who belong to the Vietnamese Eucharist Youth Movement. They also serve at other events like funerals and weddings. These good young men and women know that they are a foundation of our future church.

Vietnamese men and women are joined in a ministry called **BAN ĐIỀU HÀNH**. They work with the priests to create a vibrant community.

Realizing that marriage is a sacrament of daily living, Father Pio Estepa, SVD, along with Clem and Eden Tagle, initiated an intercultural **Marriage Encounter Group** that met monthly until the onset of the Covid pandemic. Exploration is beginning again to restart this ministry.

The **Hispanic acolytes** are eight adolescents who attend faith formation classes. They serve during Sunday Masses and also at celebrations such weddings, *quinceañeras*, and multicultural celebrations.

The Hispanic choir, **Santa Cecilia Choir**, was founded in 1991 and has undergone changes in its participants. The current choir has 12 members who actively participate in animating Sunday Mass and special celebrations.

Participation in the liturgy is enriched by the Hispanic ministry through the 7 **Lectors** who offer their ability to proclaim the Word

The Hispanic **Ushers** offers welcoming by accommodating those parishioners who attend Mass distributing bulletins, collecting the envelopes. These 6 people faithfully bring the presence of Christ to Mass attendees.

The Folklore group brings the Hispanic culture to life during parish celebrations such as the annual festival of the Sacred Heart, *Dia de los Muertos*, and the procession from Sacred Heart Church to the Church of the Immaculate Conception on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The English-speaking Community is getting smaller each year; yet, they continue as active Mass attendants, participating as Lectors and Eucharistic ministers. They also sponsor a day of Recollection in Lent and have monthly **Bible sharing** gathering of approximately 10 people.

During 2021-2022, volunteer **ESL teachers**—working under a grant from the Memphis Public Library—offered classes of English as a Second Language for parishioners, giving confidence to parishioners to master the English language. Future classes are planned to assist those studying for their citizenship.

In 2012, when Father Simon Hoang, SVD, became Pastor, Bishop Steib suggested that he unite the two existing Vietnamese communities of Blessed Sacrament Church and Sacred Heart Church into one Community. Father Simon began this process. All the faithful Vietnamese in the two communities trusted in the will of God and the good of the community; therefore, the two communities, The Fatima Community and the Sacred Heart community, became one Vietnamese community.

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With great skill, Father Simon rebuilt both the people of God into this one community and struggled to keep the 100-year-old Church and auxiliary buildings in good repair. The community not only survived but grew. The old St. Vincent de Paul soup kitchen was remodeled into a new rectory, thus freeing space in the old rectory for classrooms and offices. Additional land was purchased and paved for parking. The garage was remodeled into a kitchen and meeting room. The basement meeting area was renovated.

Parish Religious Education (PRE) at Sacred Heart Church would not be possible without the loving and devoted help of volunteer catechists and teaching assistants throughout the many years. There are about 18-20 classes taught every year for the English, Hispanic, and Vietnamese communities combined. From 2009–2022, the number of catechists and assistants increased from 13 to 43 volunteers. Director of Religious Education, Jose Magaña, encouraged all catechists take part in formation programs offered through the Diocese of Memphis, and weekends for Vietnamese catechists. Similarly, the number of students has expanded from 80 to more than 172 children in the past two decades. Even through the years of the unexpected pandemic, many catechists helped to teach online, and 128 students returned in 2021-2022 to continue their faith-learning journey. Through their weekly preparations, commitments, and caring hearts towards their students, the Catechists and assistants at Sacred Heart Parish continue to faithfully teach about our Catholic faith through God’s love and guidance. Maria Le is the current DRE.

The heart of Christianity is the Heart of Jesus who shows us a compassionate love of all. During 2021-2022, Sacred Heart experienced the greatest challenges of this love. In March of 2020, all churches of the Dioceses were locked down due to the pandemic of Covid 19. During this time virtual Masses were offered to the community. A faithful few returned to in-person attendance at church until—on May 8, 2021—a fire destroyed the sacristy and damaged the interior of the church. Vietnamese and Spanish Masses were moved to Blessed Sacrament Church, with English Masses and daily Masses being held in the dining room of the old rectory. Other churches responded to the needs of Sacred Heart: Immaculate Conception Cathedral offered the opportunity to join their community for the reception of sacraments. St. Patrick’s Church hosted an outside multicultural Pentecost celebration outside the Fed Ex Forum.

In 2021 Father Brandon Nguyen, SVD, accepted the challenge to be Pastor of a church being restored, and of leading the people of God to embrace a lifestyle based on the transforming power of the Sacred Heart. In 2021 two community-wide celebrations were held outside under a large tent: one to install Father Brandon as the new Pastor, and the other to offer our gratitude to Father Simon, for his generous gifts of time, talent, and treasure to the people of God.

Father Brandon’s energy sparks a new commitment to parish life, through Liturgy and the study of Scripture. His ability to speak all three languages fluently, as had Fr. Simon, enables the parish communities to continue to function well together. His faith witness challenges each of us to re-commit ourselves to our mission statement. A new ministry Fr. Brandon has initiated is to gather the English-speaking community for a Lectio Divina sharing once a month, followed by a luncheon.

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After the community celebrations held at Blessed Sacrament for a year we are graced to return to the physical site of the Church as we celebrate 100 years since the laying of its cornerstone. After several delays, on June 30, 2022, Bishop David P. Talley rededicated this Church, providing a multicultural center for worship in Midtown. One hundred years has seen the neighborhood and the faces of parishioners change, yet through the love of the Sacred Heart we continue to be energized to be a presence of God in this changing world.

What will the faces, the languages, be in 2122? We entrust the continuance of providing an oasis in the desert to those who follow in our footsteps, to affirm our mission: that the Christ in me is the Christ in you.

—Compiled by Sister Trudy Foster, at the request of Father Simon Hoang, SVD.