

**WHAT WE WERE . . . AND WHAT WE HAVE BECOME  
A HISTORY OF OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA CATHOLIC CHURCH**



In 1949, Father Anthony Keil, S.S.J., pastor of Our Mother of Mercy church in Houston/decided to purchase 12 lots of land in the Fidelity area for \$2,400. His concern for a Catholic church in the area was prompted by several visits from people in the Clinton Park community. Their concern was that the growing Catholic community in Fidelity, Galena Park, and Clinton Park could not attend Mass at Our Mother of Mercy due to lack of transportation, public as well as private. His prayer was that someday a place would become available close enough.

In January 1950, the Clinton Park Theater was abandoned. An average of 150 Catholics attended the first Mass in this building. As the mission family grew, the communities of Pleasantville, Galena Manor, and Clinton View joined the three original communities. Prior to that time, the majority of the Pleasantville community was attending Mass at Our Mother of Mercy or St. Nicholas. Father Cornelius Sullivan celebrated the first Mass in the "Clinton Park Theater". For two years, faithful parishioners participated in Mass in the abandoned theater once a month.

With the help of monetary, physical, and spiritual contributions from residents of the six communities, a small temporary mission building was constructed. The chapel was named Our Lady Star of the Sea. The name seemed appropriate since so many of the parishioners were seaman, longshoremen, and dockworkers employed by the Port of Houston.

On January 13, 1952, the mission dedicated its first permanent church. There were approximately 140 families registered with 150 children enrolled in the Catechism classes, which were initially taught outdoors. The initial First Communion celebration was held in 1953. Ministries and programs were established to raise spiritual awareness and a number of fundraisers were hosted to raise money in order to continue expansion of the physical building. In 1954, a hall was built adjacent to the

church. This made way for Catechism classes to be held indoors.

In August 1957, Our Lady Star of the Sea received full parish status with Father Joseph Lally, S.S.J, serving as Pastor. The first baptism celebrated in the church was on July 15, 1957. In March 1958, plans were approved for a rectory to be built. With the continued growth of the parish, it became necessary to divide the Catechism classes. Some were held in the hall and some in the church.

Various organizations were established early in the history of the parish. The Holy Name Society, the Sodality, and ushers were all open to adults who wanted to participate in the spiritual and temporal life of the parish. In 1957, the Knights of Peter Claver, Council #139 was organized. In 1960, the Ladies Auxiliary, Court #139 was formed. In later years, the Altar Boys organization, the Junior Knights & Daughters of St. Peter Claver were formed to give young people many opportunities through the faith.

The parish has been blessed with the services of many Josephite priests. Each one came with a multitude of talents and contributed to the continued growth of Our Lady Star of the Sea. The most significant characteristic of the parish has been the influence and cooperation of the assigned priests and the laity, dating back to the cooperation of Father Sullivan in the construction of the church from 1958 - 1961. Father Joseph Lally, S.S.J. and Father Robert Sweeney, S.S.J served as Pastor and Administrator from 1961-1962. In 1962 -1968, Father Francis Fallon S.S.J., served as pastor.

In August 1968, Father Joseph Murphy, S.S.J. was assigned to the parish. His concern for classroom space for the CCD classes prompted the need for a larger hall. The number of students had increased to 365. Education has always been an important entity of Our Lady Star of the Sea and it was through the volunteer of 24 teachers opening their homes that the program was able to continue during the renovation of the hall. CCD classes were dispersed into 24 centers in Pleasantville, Galena Manor, and Clinton Park. Each Monday 365 children in elementary and high school attended classes.

In 1971, the small hall was remodeled and expanded to triple in size better accommodating the large religious instruction program. The number of kids increased after that renovation, and then there became a need to have two CCD sessions; one on Saturday after the 4 pm Mass for the Elementary students and another after the 10:30 Mass on Sunday for the Middle and High school students.

In 1976, Father John Harfrnan, S.S.J. was assigned to the parish. During his one-year term, he was instrumental in promoting youth activities, involving himself, as well as the children and parents. He also encouraged and invited women to become Lectors. In 1977, Father Francis Hull, S.JJ., was assigned Pastor. The original hall was renovated and a new metal addition that could be divided into seven bays was added. The entire building, as a unit, was dedicated on October 1, 1977 as the St. Charles Lwanga Center. Under his direction, the church underwent a complete renovation. Some of the major renovations involved, removing the upstairs balcony, adding carpet to the church, and adding the cry room. Mass was not held in the church for sev-eral months.

In 1981through1985, while Father John McBreaty, S.S.J, was pastor, renovations of the

church continued with a new ceiling, air conditioning and completion of the sanctuary.

Our Lady Star of the Sea continued to be blessed with wonderful Josephite priests who continued to provide services and use of their talents. The following Josephites served as pastors from 1985-1992; Father John Carroll, SSJ; and Father Rawlin Enette, SSJ. Father Enette was the first African American priest assigned to the parish.

These priests, along with the help of many dedicated parishioners, have continued to enhance the growth of Our Lady Star of the Sea by supporting such programs and ministries such as the St. Vincent DePaul, Evangelization, and the Seniors Club. Throughout decades, many spiritual changes have taken place. Eucharistic Ministers currently assist with the distribution of the Body and Blood of Christ during Mass, in addition to bringing communion to the sick and shut-in. Now young ladies serve as Altar servers.

From the very beginning, Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish family has never missed an opportunity to help make the worship facilities and its surroundings more pleasant. Many have worked and continue to work with activities and fundraisers such as the annual bazaar, zydeco dances, Soul food day, fish fry's, crawfish boils, etc. Without the help of such a devoted group, many financial challenges could not be met.

The parish currently serves approximately 350 African-American families, under the leadership of Father Louis R. Saporito, S.S.J. Three Masses are celebrated each weekend; one on Saturday and two on Sunday. Our Lady Star of the Sea is fortunate to have musicians for all three services. A youth choir has been established and performs at the 10:30 am Mass on Sunday. During the school months, on Sundays at 10:30 Mass, the children participate as lectors and ushers giving them an opportunity to steward their talents to God.

Today, the little chapel on Fidelity Road, where a marquee sign once read "Sunday Only", in 1950, is now surrounded by beautiful landscape, two parking lots, renovation of the rectory and hall with a fully equipped kitchen, and the St. Vincent DePaul trailer. A new addition to the parish grounds is the "Shack in the Back" (the hangout after services for the parish family to gather and fellowship).

Many dedicated people have worked to make this 50 years in existence a reality. Parishioners' names are not mentioned, however, it does not mean that the service of these dedicated people has been overlooked. As changes occurred in the parish over the years, each person should be able to feel a sense of pride and recognize how he or she played a vital part in these changes. We must remember that God always recognizes us by the blessings he bestows and it is through him that we share joys of this glorious event.