

IMMACULATE HEART *of* MARY CHURCH
LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO

DEDICATION PROGRAM

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Perhaps all history is but a study in contrasts between what once was and what is now; and over the universal record men have hung the masks of Comedy and Tragedy – so near allied that, as seen only from the surface, they show but a single difference: the lips of Comedy upward – tilting toward fulfillment – those of Tragedy sloping downward toward doom.

Of course there are contrast to be found in the short history of the Immaculate Heart of Mary parish; but after brief acknowledgment of those souls who lament all change as tragic and who sorrow over any remembrance of things past, it is necessary in the cause of truth to affirm that in this record hope prevails; and fulfillment of many works and prayers stands solidly proclaimed in the beauty of the new church.

Surely, however, we admit the contrast between past days and present moment. We remember the isolation of the little chapel-of-ease that Father David J. Kirgan built between 1947 and 1948 on what was then that dusty and unfrequented corner of Idaho and Espina, where flash floods still rushed periously close when the infrequent rains came. Few of the town's Catholics had ever actually seen the chapel; and to those who had, it was a glimpse from a distance as they ventured down Solano, that stretch of bad, unsettled road from Lohman to the college. In those days, few of the chapel's 250 seats were ever filled all at one time.

Then came the change that transformed New Mexico from a realm not readily identifiable as a *bona fide* state of the Union in the minds of many Americans on the "outside," into one of the fastest-growing regions in our country, when people flooded into the Enchanted Land from north to south to begin the work of a new post-war age. Many of them from White Sands came to the quiet corner where the chapel stood; and it was changed.

It was made a separate parish under the name of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1953, with Father William H. Ryan as pastor. His rectory and office were in a small house across the street from the spot where the school now stands, and so rapid was the growth of the new parish that these temporary quarters seemed inadequate almost within weeks. Masses were now attended by increasing crowds, and the 250 seats offered increasingly insufficient accommodations for them. With the people came their children, and in 1957 – only four years after his becoming pastor – Father Ryan saw the completion of the beautiful new school where the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, who came that same year, were to offer the little ones the Catholic education which is their birth-right.

So many children came, and then so many more, that the Sisters needed help. Then the lay-apostolate began, with two girls from Philadelphia who came to fill this urgent need. Their sacrifice and that of those of other young women who came after has enabled the school to continue under the pressures of the ever-increasing enrollment, with no increase in the number of teaching Sisters.

In 1960, when Father Ryan was transferred to the St. Genevieve's parish, Father Everett Finley came to replace him. Under the new pastor, the number of Catholic families continued to increase, and the need for a new and larger church became urgent. Plans were initiated, and a campaign to raise funds was started in January, 1965.

The new church was begun in September, 1965 to be finished in May, 1966. It's design is contemporary South-western. Before the building began, Father Finley returned to the army as a chaplain, and Father Thomas O'Mahony was put in charge.

Certainly Father Tom, who took over for the duration of Father Finley's absence, is a continuing inspiration to the members of the parish with his own dedication to service and sacrifice. He extols the help constantly given him by the Rosary and Altar Society, and by the Holy Name Society, whose members have unstintingly performed their designated functions, and much besides.

At Father's suggestion, a Parish Committee was formed in September, 1965, to help in the administration of the parish. This is a permanent committee representing various professions and occupations with a diversity of knowledge and experience that proves invaluable in many matters including that of setting up an operating budget.

This is something new to the Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, and to the Church; and is one example of the greater participation of the laity resulting from the Vatican Council.

Likewise in keeping with the Council's concern that parochial schools to maintain standards as high, or higher, than those of the public schools, the Parish Board of Education has been formed. The purpose of this board is to promote a better understanding of Catholic education, implement the policies of the diocesan office, be responsible for achieving a high standard of academic achievement, and set up an operating budget.

Serving on the Board are three professors from New Mexico State University, five of the officials and faculty from the Las cruces public school system, and three local business men.

Then there is the Home and School Society, whose members have worked zealously toward the school's success, showing themselves willing to make any effort to safeguard their children's privilege to attend Catholic schools. Presently, in less than 10 years since the school's completion, it enrolls 350 students. Next year there will be a kindergarten with 50 pupils. The new teacher has her degree in education with special courses in guidance and psychology.

However, with this growth in both size and excellence (a notable achievement, since quantity and quality do not always go together), there are a growing difficulties to be immediately met and solved. The school has been losing financially during the past year, with the proliferation of its pupils and its determined progress toward increasing excellence of instruction. Here the Home and School Society came forward to offer a voluntary increase in tuition. And the acquiring of two new classrooms must be effected to provide adequate space at once for the students already enrolled. This has been effected by giving the Sisters a new residence, and the building which up to the present has been the home of the Lay-Apostles.

There have been heavy demands on the members of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, from among whom have come all the lay teachers to cope with many crowded classes which they gladly teach. There are eighteen Saturday morning classes for grades one through six; two Wednesday evening classes for grades seven and eight, and seven Sunday evening classes for the high school students, among whose teachers are several professors from the University.

But the greatest challenge lies ahead. To Father O'Mahony it confronts the most privileged segment of our society – the educated Catholic youth – in whom our greatest hope for the future must rest. It is evident that the school cannot continue without the help of the lay apostles; there are still only four Sisters, and the 800 families now in the parish will not decrease in number. Father envisions a kind of Catholic Peace Corps to guarantee the continuation of Catholic education for Catholic children. It will consist of young Catholic men and women who have completed their college education, are certified to teach, and will devote one year of their lives at a low stipend, to this most elevated of all commitments which their chosen profession is ever likely to offer them. With the University at hand, and with the New Mexico's considerable population of young Catholic graduates, Father believes that many of them will come forward. He will actively invite them to come, convinced that they will not fail to respond.

In this retrospective glimpse of the short, happy life of the parish, one thing strikingly emerges: the unity among its members, the devotion of its pastors, and the benevolence of the Bishop. Contrast is everywhere; but unity prevails amid the diversity. In every step we trace, we can see the determined direction which has led through difficulty to this day of fulfillment, the day of the dedication of the new Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. And we see a compelling vision of the future, with parishioners and pastor, under the wise and loving guidance of their Bishop, the Most Reverend Sidney Matthew Metzger, seeking always to attain new dimensions of growth to meet the ever-growing needs of our human and Catholic family.

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