

History of Sacred Heart Catholic Church

FROM THE PIONEERS TO TODAY

Lake Worth's early beginnings came in 1912, when pioneers began buying lots in the area then called Lucerne. Catholic families were among the land purchasers who braved the mosquitoes, snakes and alligators to settle in the town that soon had a post office, Union Protestant Church, St. Andrew Episcopal Church and a newspaper. The Lucerne Herald newspaper was renamed Lake Worth Herald in December 1912, when the city's name became Lake Worth.

The Jesuit missionaries of St. Ann in West Palm Beach, who came from Tampa in 1892 bringing Catholicism to the five counties that presently compose the Diocese of Palm Beach, tended to the spiritual needs of the Lake Worth Catholics through their growing mission work in the territory.

Families of the close-knit Lake Worth community including the Lobsingers, Schmidts, Greers, Gorhams and Lamars opened their homes for the celebration of Mass, inviting the townspeople. The families began building a small wood-framed mission church in 1915, which was completed the following year and blessed and dedicated by Bishop Michael J. Curley, the bishop of St. Augustine at that time.

The new mission church represented the growing Catholic community: energetic, self-reliant, faith-filled people with dreams of building good Christian homes, spreading Gospel values and developing a spirit of community.

The mission community continued to grow as Lake Worth grew. In 1921, Church leaders declared Sacred Heart a parish. Bishop Patrick Barry of St. Augustine appointed Father William Nachtrab as the first pastor Nov. 2, 1921, and he immediately began ministry.

The next decades brought growth and many changes in the parish, the city of Lake Worth and South Florida. A total of 14 pastors have served Sacred Heart including three monsignors. Father Nachtrab led the parish the longest, serving 21 years. Father Quesnel Delvard came in 2014, and before him were Father Joseph Papes, who served six years, and Father Peter Van Nguyen, who was pastor 11 years.

The community of Lake Worth changed from a population of American folks venturing south from the northern states to a multiethnic, multicultural community. Sacred Heart Parish continues to evolve and change to best serve the needs of the diverse community.

SCHOOL IS A PARISH HIGHLIGHT

Father James Cann was appointed pastor in 1942. His priority was Catholic education and a school for the children. Sacred Heart School opened September 1944 with 56 students under the direction of the Sisters of St. Joseph from St. Augustine. Within six years, enrollment reached 250.

Over the decades, the school has become as diverse as the community and parish, and evolved into a state-of-the art school-serving children of the community with a firm mission: "to educate the whole child, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually, in preparation for their future," according to school leaders.

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At the present time, the school continues to expand facilities, educational opportunities and technology to better serve children and provide learning opportunities for all youngsters, especially children from low-income families.

One of many school highlights came in 1976 when a graduate from the class of 1964 celebrated his first Mass as a priest at Sacred Heart Church. That graduate was Father Thomas Wenski, now Archbishop Wenski of Miami. The archbishop continues to be a supporter of his alma mater.

THE CHURCH AND ITS COMMUNITY

In 1951, Sacred Heart Church's beautiful stained-glass windows were completed, blessed and dedicated. In preparation of Sacred Heart's anniversary celebration this month, the church was renovated through the generosity of faithful parishioners and a fundraising campaign.

The pews were refinished, the roof was replaced and a new air-conditioning unit was installed. Walkways were redone. A choir loft was glassed, converting it into a children's room. Marble was installed on the floors, and the altar was expanded with new furnishing and restored tabernacle. Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito blessed the altar and church during celebrations Sept. 27, 2015.

Today, the parish has grown to 1,200 registered families. New ministries are in place. Spanish and Creole Masses are celebrated to better serve the community and the parish continues to welcome all.

Sacred Heart is diverse and multicultural with people of all ages and backgrounds. There is a large population of people linked to Spanish-speaking countries and to Haiti, and people from all over the world.

Sacred Heart holds steadfast to its mission: "Together, we answer our Christian calling to worship God, grow in holiness and share our faith in Christ by loving and serving our brothers and sisters."