

As current parishioners, we are both the beneficiaries and the caretakers of the proud heritage of faith and ministry in the great city of Memphis.

In 1866 Father Riordan held the first St. Patrick Parish Service in his parsonage to serve the Irish Catholics in south Memphis who were too numerous to be served by St. Peter's and St. Mary's in uptown Memphis north of Main Street. (Possibly a little lowbrow for the uptown crowd also). The new brick Church was christened in 1869 on this location on the same two streets outside that however were called Linden and Desoto at that time. That took commitment and sacrifice on the part of our parishioner forebearers to provide for the needs by then of a school, parsonage and new church. The bell in the belltower in that church was donated by a retired riverboat captain from one of his steamboats. Just 4 years after christening a new church our parish survived through yellow fever epidemics in 1873, 1878, and 1879.

Our founding pastor Father Riordan made the ultimate sacrifice when he succumbed to yellow fever in the '78-epidemic ministering to the sick as did his successor Father Doyle in '79. Our church still has the death records of lost parishioners during those years, remember the working-class Irish of these neighborhoods didn't have the means to flee the city like much of the Memphis population. Although many did camp in the outskirts of the city to avoid the poisonous vapors in the city, ignorant to the fact that mosquitos were the culprit and were they were no safer and possibly less camping in the woods.

40 years after our birth as a parish we had outgrown the original brick church and the new and current church we enjoy today had its cornerstone laid in 1904 and christened in 1905. This certainly took commitment and sacrifice to build this beautiful Romanesque Church we enjoy today. Our parish flourished and grew. However, in 1954, the Catholic Diocese of Tennessee handed over our parish to the Paulist fathers who ministered to our Parish and adopted St. Patrick as their headquarters. Sacrifice and caretaking to keep our heritage alive and vibrant.

Fast forward to 1968, the assassination of Martin Luther King, just blocks from here capped off a decade that saw an exodus of both churches and population from the Memphis downtown area to the popular suburbs. The Paulist Fathers stayed, their stake firmly planted in the ground and ministered to our increasingly impoverished population. Our St. Patrick Ministry of taking care of the poor grew and grew. More Commitment and sacrifice. Those were tough years for St. Patrick, at one point the pews in the church were sold to help finances.

In 2013, with the Parish in decline in membership and physical condition, the Paulist Fathers in declining numbers themselves had to give up their association with our St. Patrick Parish. The Diocese of West Tennessee took over and diocesan priests took over.

I moved to Memphis and started attending St. Patrick in 2014 and it felt like a church on its last legs. We kind of had a rotation of priests none of which lived on site and it felt like the diocese was keeping the church open because it was a beautiful historic church and a great place for Catholic tourists coming to our city. I remember sermons asking for financial support.

Reminding all the Memphians who belonged to other parishes and only visited St. Patrick once or twice a year for a nostalgic weekend that St. Patrick has financial needs too. St. Peter's, not far away, in 2014 was beautiful and full while St. Patrick was run down, neglected and sparsely attended. Not long ago someone asked me why I decided to attend St. Patrick? I thought about it and it was sympathy— St. Peter's had enough support, St. Patrick didn't.

The next Chapter of St. Patrick life began in 2017. Our Diocesan leadership at the time felt the need to shake things up and it think every pastor in Memphis changed churches. I am not sure the circumstances, but Father Val was the well-beloved Pastor at Immaculate Conception. Father Val requested to become the Pastor of St. Patrick. His request was granted either because he was well thought of by the diocese or because no one else asked for St. Patrick— probably both. Father Val brought a vibrancy to our Parish on day one that we probably had not experienced in 30+ years, maybe more. He also had some portion of his flock follow him to St. Patrick. He also recruited Rose O'Sullivan as pastoral assistant. I think they both averaged 10 -12-hour days 7 days per week. Commitment and sacrifice. When he requested we fix up the rectory for him to live in full time, oh boy what a request, the rectory had not had people living in it full time for 20 years. His family was concerned for his safety and many of us were a little worried ourselves. (The rectory was actually within a few blocks of the highest poverty and crime rates in all of Memphis.) Thank you, Father Val., for your commitment and sacrifice.

Parish volunteers worked day and night to refloor the entire facility upstairs, paint, replace appliances, new cabinets, security, etc. Commitment and sacrifice. You know, we are keenly aware of our Parish's history and have said more than a few prayers for the recent pandemic to spare our St. Patrick Pastor in this century.

We have had volunteer building and grounds days when dozens came pre-pandemic to fix stained glass windows, plant trees, rejuvenate the lawn, fix roofs and gutters and paint, paint and paint. Now St. Patrick is growing and thriving.

So, what's next for St. Patrick? I'm not here to tell you we need a new church; I think you can all breathe a sigh of relief to hear that. However, we are all beneficiaries of previous parishioners who have built our parish churches or sacrificed to keep our parish alive during difficult times. I'm asking you to support maintaining the wonderful gift of our St. Patrick church we were blessed with. With over 20,000 square feet, normal ongoing maintenance is typically

estimated just under \$2 a square foot or ~\$40,000 per year. I'm just asking for commitment and sacrifice.

- Dave Smith