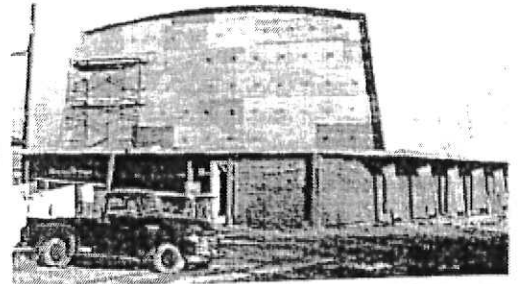


In celebration of our 50th Anniversary, we will re-run in the bulletin a series of 12 articles about the history of our parish. These articles were written and researched for The Messenger newsletter by Anne Kurek and ran from 2007 until 2009. If you have memories or corrections to add to the story, please contact Anne in the parish office. We welcome your input!

Parish Beginnings: Building the Church



The little rock church at St. Therese still stands & is used for parties and other events.



Left- This building on 7800 South & 1530 West was leased and used temporarily while the new church was being built. It is now an H&R Block office. Right- The church as it was being constructed. The pick-up truck in front belonged to Louis Lopez.

The story of how our church came to be built is a sweet and inspiring one. It was truly a labor of love and parish community at its best.

EARLY SOUTH VALLEY CATHOLICS

There used to be towns and hamlets up in the canyons of the Kennecott copper mine. They had unique and unusual names such as Dinkeyville, Lark, Highland Boy, Frog Town and Jap Camp. These communities were heavily Catholic, populated by immigrants who came to work in the mines. They came from all over the world—Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, China, Japan and Sweden. There was also a sizeable population of Hispanic Catholics, many from New Mexico, California and Colorado. In the late 1950's and early 1960's the mines started to expand and miners and their families were forced to move out of the canyon. Many of them settled in West Jordan, South Jordan and Riverton, predominantly LDS areas.

At first these south valley Catholics attended Mass at St. Therese's in Midvale in the "Little Rock Church" (pictured above). In time this little church became too crowded. Father John Sullivan, a persuasive, energetic and very well respected man from Immaculate Conception in Copperton went to Bishop Federal to see if a new church could be built in West Jordan. The bishop was not opposed to the idea, but money was a problem. The desire for a "home of their own" was so strong, the displaced mining families were willing to donate their money, their time, their hard work— whatever it took to make this new parish happen.

HOME OF THEIR OWN

The land for the new church was farmland and was purchased in 1962 from A.C. Furse, a farmer from England. The lot was large and was designed to eventually include a school as well as a church. The church would face east towards the school and the area in between would be an open courtyard. There was a small house on the land, a shed and some large chicken coops. Under a mutual agreement, Furse would live in the southwest corner of the property until he was ready to move at which time the property would be sold to St. Joseph's. On the day he was ready to move, however, he was tragically struck dead by a car. His descendants were not so agreeable about selling the land to the church and sold it to another family. This explains why there is a privately-owned house located so close to the parish hall.

On September 1, 1963, the land west of the Jordan River between 6400 South and the Salt Lake/Utah County line officially became part of Immaculate Conception Parish and the new West Jordan Catholic Mission was born. Chapel space was first rented at a small grocery store called Adondakis (now an H&R Block office, pictured above.)

BEFORE GROUND WAS BROKEN

History shows July 1964 as the official “ground breaking”. However, a LOT of work preceded this. The very first project was to cut down an enormous tree which stood close to the northwest corner where the church would be constructed. This tree was over 7 feet across at the base and was considered to be the largest tree in West Jordan. A volunteer work committee (Raquel Romero, James Romero, Jim Perry, Louis Lopez, Raymond Trujillo, Willie Romero, and Nick Velarde) was formed to cut down the tree. They came with their axes and saws— not one owned a chainsaw back then. They soon realized they would need to hire professionals. The pros brought in a crane and a crew. As they cut the first branch, it fell onto Redwood Road and blocked all traffic for well over an hour. Redwood Road was just a 2 lane road back then. Another major job was to level the land. The property sloped down from west to east. Tony and brother Joe Mascaro brought in tons and tons of dirt in their trucks to level the property.

Most of the West Jordan Mission Catholics were miners and it happened that Kennecott mine went on strike beginning July 1963 for 90 days. There was so much to be done at the church site— laying out the building, clearing the grounds, filling in with backfill. Fr. Sullivan came up with a plan. He would offer jobs to the laid-off workers. They had the option of getting paid or they could donate their work to the new church. A careful accounting of names and hours was kept in a ledger. It quickly became apparent that there was no reason to keep this ledger because every single worker donated his labor to the church.

BUILDING THE CHURCH

Ground was officially broken in July 1964. Fr. Sullivan worked as the contractor. Howa was the company hired to help with the construction. They furnished 2 full-time foremen. Design plans were executed by the architectural firm of Holland, McGill and Pasker. All the rest were volunteer crews who worked day and night to get the job done.

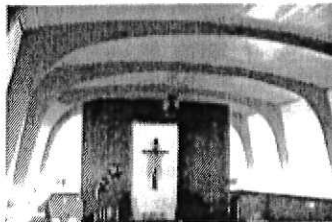
One of the first things they did was dig holes for the 7 large support beams (see photo below). These were dug by hand— 4 ft by 4 ft. The beams weighed thousands of pounds each. There were 7 sets of them joined in the center to form an arch. It took 4 hours and 51 minutes to put up the first arch. Two cranes were placed at opposite ends (N & S) of the building, each supporting one of the massive beams. They were secured in the middle with the help of Teddy Valenzuela, then only 17 years old. Teddy sat on the large crane ball, bolts and tools were placed in a bucket and they were hoisted way up to the center where the beams met. He bolted the two beams together. Later, everyone wanted to get up on the ball and secure the beams. They had to draw straws to see who would do this. This process was repeated and improved with each of the beams. The last beam took only 48 minutes to put up.

After this, a trench was dug. It was 4 feet wide and 5’4” deep and ran the length of the



Louis Lopez holds his special trophy of St. Joseph that he and all of the founders received.

It reads:
*Appreciation
Louis Lopez
St. Joseph the Worker
Church
1965*



These large arches supported the church ceiling. There were 7 of these.

On the right, Danny Ronquillo climbs out of a hole in the floor of the furnace room that leads to the heating trench. Danny was a child when the church was being built. He remembers playing in the parking lot while his father worked on the church.

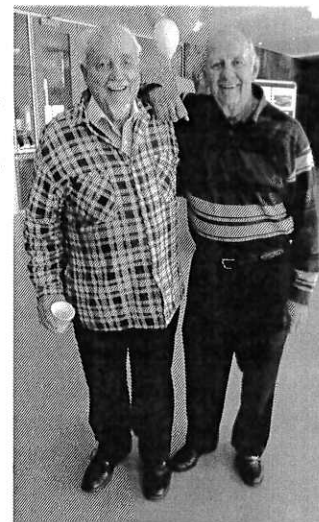


church. This was dug by hand using picks and shovels and wheelbarrows. Side trenches were also dug which lead to heating vents. A downdraft furnace would blow air, heat it and push it through the tunnels. When cement for the floor was poured, the frame to this trench fell apart. Tons of this destroyed cement were buried under the church and caused the altar area to be raised. The trench was fixed and then the floor was poured. Workers covered the floor with water for 30 days in order to make the floor very sturdy. The floor held up to its very last day.

So many people brought in their skills and talents. Jake Pando was in charge of the electrical work. David Gonzalez did the door work, brought equipment and graded the parking lot. Louis Lopez did paneling and finishing work. "I put in the first nail and the last one," he says. Conrad Sena did upholstery work—the red padding which ran around the inside walls of the church as well the kneelers. Jim Perry was there from start to finish. "There's not an inch of that church that I didn't help build," he says proudly. Joe Marks, Steve Anzures, Sam Deluca, Tony Anselmo, Dominic Lapur, Mel Sanchez, Rex Bateman, Leo Valenzuela, Procopio Vigil, Melardo Velarde, Aaron Vasquez and his boys all played prominent roles.

The property was always abuzz with activity. Most of the time there were work crews of 30-40 people present. Everyone helped. One man Jim Perry will always remember came to him and said, "I have no skills but I'd really like to help." Jim thought it over and said, "We can always use someone to clean up." That man came every single day the building was being built. He straightened boards, picked up old wire and sawed lumber. His help was invaluable. Women helped as well. They prepared food for the hungry workers. They cleaned, painted and waxed for days. "It was a beehive of people," says Margie Perry.

All of this hard work paid off. The church was completed and ready for its very first Mass on February 21, 1965. Read all about it and more in next week's bulletin!



We were able to re-connect with sculptor Paul Kline and architect Art Pasker, during construction of the new church. We invited them both to a luncheon in the spring of 2011. They were delighted to see each other—they had not seen each other since 1965!

Interesting tidbits

- The pews were ordered from a company in Texas. They were supposed to be a dark wood to match the paneling. Fr. Sullivan was very excited when he heard they were being shipped. He called his volunteers and said, "There will be truckloads of these. We need as much help as we can get." Several men came to help, ready to unload the trucks. Their mouths dropped when they saw the light white oak pews. Father quickly got on the phone with the company who offered them a discount to keep them. The parish needed the pews and could use the discount, so they kept them .
- When the property was first purchased there was a small shed on the land which was used for beer storage. Fr. Sullivan thought this would be a well-deserved treat for the workers who could go enjoy a drink from time to time. However, the beer kept disappearing and few workers got to benefit, so the shed came down.
- The granite walls at the front of the church were poured on site in chicken coops which were on the property. They were designed by artist Paul Kline. These walls have been preserved and stand in front of the new church.
- The organizers wanted the carpet to be green in honor of Fathers Sullivan and his assistant, Fr. Matthew Wixted, who were both Irish. However, the bishop told them it must be red, and a cherry red carpet was installed.
- The loft that was used as an overflow areas used to be the choir loft and housed an organ. Louis Lopez recalls standing in the choir loft on Holy Thursday in 1966 when an earthquake struck. The whole church shook and "sounded like a creaky old boat," recalls Louis.