

The Parish in the New Millennium: Good-bye Old Friend

This is part 10 of a 12 part series about our parish history which we are running in the bulletin to celebrate our 50th anniversary year. Parts 9 to 12 focus on the parish in the new millennium. This article covers the very early stages of building a new church.

With the success of the sports field under their belts, Fr. Carley and the parish started looking at an even bigger project— building a new church. A small group met in the fall of 2006— consisting of Father Carley, Sister Fabian, Mike Burns, Tricia Johnson, John Allen, Ken Reiter and Anne Kurek. They decided that the first thing that needed to be done was to see how parishioners felt about taking on a project of this magnitude. A survey was taken the weekend of October 28 and 29, 2006 and an overwhelming majority, 95%, of parishioners were open to the idea. Next, in January 15, 2007, the parish council met with guest Mike Lee from the Diocese who explained some basic guidelines to building a new church. The council then voted unanimously in favor of moving forward. It was at this time that The Messenger parish newsletter started researching our parish history and began these series of articles which we are reprinting and bringing up to date for our 50th anniversary. The Salt Lake Tribune caught wind of our interesting history and wrote a major article about it. Nothing describes better the mixed feelings of excitement and sadness at this time in our parish history and so we are reprinting it here:

Bittersweet farewell

Worshippers at St. Joseph the Worker prepare to replace their beloved but outdated church

By Linda Fantin
Special to the Tribune
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WEST JORDAN - Mining is dirty and dangerous work, loved and loathed and, as we've seen in Huntington*, capable of creating a fierce sense of community. To have a place to call home and lose it is heart-breaking. To get it back and forsake it is even worse.

That is why some Catholics in this Salt Lake suburb are lamenting the loss of their beloved but outdated church, a lonely, loaflike structure that answers the question: What if a Red Barn Restaurant mated with a Wonder Bread warehouse?

Yet the people who worship at St. Joseph the Worker at 7405 S. Redwood Road are hardly a bland, bleached, textureless bunch. Their families came from Greece, Yugoslavia, China, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, Spain and France to toil in the copper mines of Bingham Canyon. They lived in communities with quirky names such as Lark, Dinkeyville and Highland Boy. They worked, played and prayed together. And when the expanding mine swallowed their towns, they became spiritual refugees, scattered around West Jordan, South Jordan and Riverton. St. Joseph's, which opened in 1965, reunited the families and restored their sense of belonging.

**This refers to the Crandall Canyon Mine disaster of August 2007. The mine, located near Huntington Utah, made headline news when six miners were trapped by a collapse. Ten days later, three rescue workers were killed by a subsequent collapse. The six miners were later declared dead and their bodies were never recovered.*

For them, the austere church is the last vestige of their upbringing and a reminder of the humble, hard-working life they still enjoy. But after 43 years, their church is weather-beaten, tired and in need of much renovation. In January, the parish council voted to replace it.

"There is a lot of pride in the church. We don't want to have that devalued," says the Rev. Patrick Carley of St. Joseph's. "We want to preserve our great heritage."

Mercurial mother

Mining was a mercurial mother to Bingham Canyon, responsible for its boom and its demise. The canyon, 25 miles southwest of Salt Lake City in the Oquirrh Mountains, was settled in 1848 by Mormon pioneers who herded cattle, cut timber and dabbled in mining until LDS Church President Brigham Young issued an edict discouraging the latter. It wasn't until 1863, when a Civil War general found the canyon's valuable ores contained gold and silver, that mining started in earnest. The 20th century ushered in the electrical age, and copper soon replaced lead and silver as the most mined mineral in the Oquirrh district.

The formation of large companies such as Boston Consolidated and Utah (Kennecott) Copper created a demand for cheap labor, and the flood of immigrants to Bingham Canyon made it one of the most ethnically diverse areas of Utah. Historians say that by 1912, 65 percent of canyon residents were foreign-born. And many of them were Catholic.

Although these ethnic groups settled in separate towns, they worshipped together - in a school at first and, as the population grew, at small churches in Carr Fork, Lark, Copperton and the like.

"Everybody got along even though we were segregated," says 62-year-old Dennis Archuleta, who grew up in Dinkeyville and spent 21 years working for Kennecott. "There was very little prejudice." The open-pit mine was continually expanding, and one by one, it devoured the towns that surrounded it. The residents, who leased or owned the houses but not the land underneath, were forever relocating.

Homes were expendable. Lisa Hansen, whose parents moved from New Mexico to work at the copper mine, says her father once won a house in a card game. But residents were more reluctant to surrender their sense of place. So they moved from town to town until the last town was gone. Hansen landed in West Jordan. So did Dennis and Susan Archuleta. "I'm still looking for Mayberry," Susan says.

A church of their own

In the 1960s, West Jordan was every bit as bucolic as the fictional home of Andy, Opie and Aunt Bee. "We used to play on Redwood Road," Dennis says of what was then a two-lane street. But with no church of their own, they attended Mass at St. Therese's Little Rock Church in Midvale until, in 1963, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City agreed to create a mission in West Jordan. South-valley Catholics had no trouble finding farmland to purchase for a church, but funds were tight and the copper mine went on strike that July.

The Rev. John Sullivan offered to hire the men to prepare the church site, and their names and hours worked were kept in a ledger - until it became obvious one wasn't needed. Every worker insisted on donating his labor, according to Anne Sheppard-Kurek, author of the church newsletter, *The Messenger*. Even after the strike ended, parishioners continued to do volunteer work - carpentry, laying tile, pouring cement - whatever it took to get the job done. According to *The Messenger*, Jake Pando was in charge of the wiring. David Gonzalez worked on the doors and graded the parking lot. Louis Lopez did paneling and finish work.

"I probably put the first nail in that church and the last," says Lopez, now 77. "Every time I see it, I say, 'With my own two hands, I helped build that.' "I know it looks like a barn, but it's so dear to me. When people say they want a new church, I think: What's wrong with the old one?"

'Not very functional'

Well, since you asked, the ceiling is bulging, the linoleum is buckling, the bathroom is too small and the foyer is cramped. The vesting room doubles as a confessional. The cry room is more like a closet. And the hall where parishioners linger over coffee and doughnuts is a parking lot away.

"I'm not bothered by simplicity," Carley says. "But the building is not very functional." Nor, he says, does it conform to the liturgical requirement set forth by the Second Vatican Council designed to encourage "full, active, conscious participation" by the congregation. St. Joseph's is a theater-style church, where parishioners sit in pews like an audience. Today, it's more common to place the altar in the middle of the sanctuary, sometimes in the nave, so that all members have clear sight lines to the action. The acoustics and lighting are better, and there is ample room for the priest to move around.

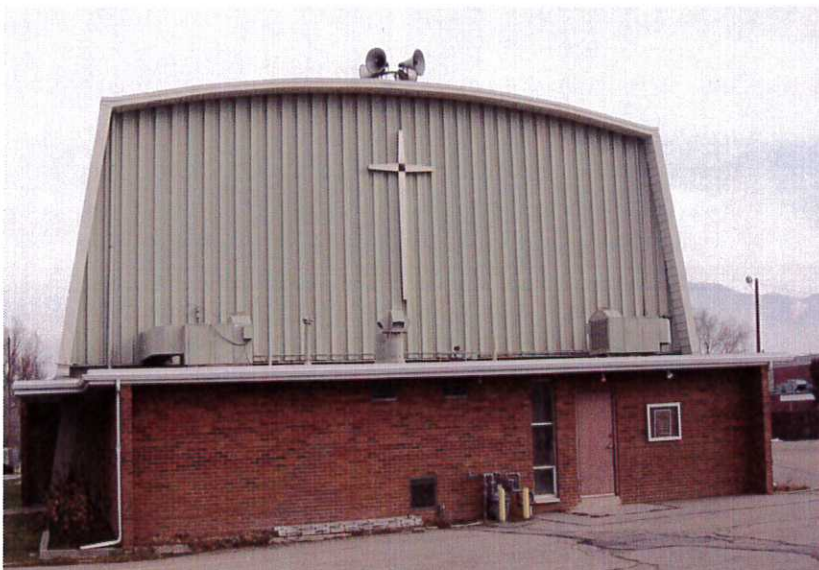


The foyer of the old church was tiny—see photo above. After Mass socializing was done in the parking lot (see photo below) or over in the hall.



And, of course, there's something called curb appeal.

"People say there are 20 good years left in the building. Right, if this were a garage," says Carley, noting the back of the church faces the street. "People drive past us on their way to other churches, people who should be attending St. Joseph's."



Left:
The back of the church faced Redwood

Moving forward

In the past, calls to build a new church were met with strong opposition. But as West Jordan has grown, so has church membership, and the mood is overwhelmingly in favor of moving forward, Carley says. Some parishioners believe the venture will fortify their faith and community just as it did for the church's founders. Others say the charm of St. Joseph's has and always will reside with its people.

Their welcoming, warm nature is why Jim Burt, who moved to the Avenues neighborhood of Salt Lake City, still worships here, and why John Allen of Taylorsville was persuaded to change parishes. "The building might change, but that doesn't mean we will," says Allen's 14-year-old daughter, Lexie.

"We're a working-class parish. I like that aspect of who we are," adds Sheppard-Kurek, a South Jordan resident and member of the new building committee. "But for this to work, everyone has to pull together. Everyone has to feel included."

Kurek is doing her part. For months, she's been writing a running history of the church and its people for the newsletter, and, with Hansen's help, collecting stories, old photos and other mementos for a scrapbook. The women also are carefully documenting the progress on the new church. Although Kurek doesn't come from a mining family, the story of St. Joseph's resonates with her just the same. Her parents were in the Marines, and they moved around a lot. "I know the sadness of not having a hometown," she says.

Last Sunday, Carley and the architects held a parishwide meeting to get input on the design and philosophy of the new building, and to discuss what elements of the old church might be saved, such as the crucifix and granite carvings on the church exterior. About 40 people attended, and everyone was enthusiastic about the future, Kurek says.

The new church will probably be modest, keeping with the personality of the parish, Carley says. Still, construction is expected to cost \$3 million to \$4 million, and he hopes to get a fundraising campaign under way by the end of the month.

"Like all little parishes, you have to jump in," he says. "You never get done if you don't begin."



Photos from the old church, left to right: Father Carley stands by the old Baptism Font; Any type of bake sale or parish promotion had to be done in the parking lot; the inside of the old church, while lovely, was laid out like a theater.

Stay tuned for Part 11 in next weekend's bulletin, "Jumping In"!