

HISTORY OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY PARISH

1950

Early members of the congregation not only raised funds, but actually pitched in to physically help construct a small wooden chapel. On **November 26, 1950**, the most **Reverend Jules B. Jeanmard**, Bishop of Lafayette, blessed and dedicated the **Chapel of The Immaculate Conception** thus becoming the third mission of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Parish.

1958

Construction of Interstate Highway 10 in 1958 forced the mission to move. Ten acres on Parish Road were purchased from Dr. Charles Fellows. The chapel was then moved (with the help of parishioners) onto the land which became the parish's permanent home.

1959

For some time, it had been apparent that larger physical facilities were required to serve the increasing Catholic population of Maplewood. The chapel was enlarged and bricked. The first Mass in the renovated building was celebrated by the **Reverend Denis Monahan, M.S.**, Pastor of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Parish, on **April 5, 1959**.

Within a few short months, on **July 5, 1959**, the **Most Reverend Maurice Schexnayder**, Bishop of Lafayette and successor to Bishop Jeanmard, blessed the building and then announced the formation of **The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church of Maplewood Parish**.

The **Reverend Henry Lenz, M.S.**, an assistant pastor at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Church, was appointed pastor of the new parish and ministered to the parish from **1959-1962**.

Later in 1959, the Simon Huval home, across the street from the church, was purchased and converted into a rectory. Also, a frame building was purchased from the Lions Club of Maplewood that was moved to the church property and developed into a **Catechetical Center**. When Father Lenz left in 1962, the work of the **Confraternity of Christian Doctrine** was doing well in the Parish.

1960's-1970's

In the early days, Immaculate Conception Parish served about 280 families, residents of Maplewood, Hollywood, Magnolia Forest, Beverly Hills, and other residential subdivisions that at the time were adjacent to the City of Sulphur.

In **1962**, under the leadership of Father Lundgren, the rectory was renovated. In **1965**, the church building was air-conditioned.

In **1968**, while Father Shahrigan was pastor, the original debt owed to Our Lady of Prompt

Succor Parish was paid off. During his time as Pastor, the parish also participated in the construction of the consolidated St. Louis High School in Lake Charles, which provided Catholic secondary education to the young men and women of Calcasieu Parish. On **October 28, 1971**, the **new Immaculate Conception Center was built and blessed.**

Parishioners continued to improve and renovate parish facilities during the pastorate of Father Fitzsimmons. A **new rectory** was built and an Open House was held on **September 26, 1976.**

AUGUST 31, 1981--TRAGEDY STRIKES

On **August 31, 1981**, a fire of undetermined origin spread quickly through the 31 year old church structure. Despite the heroic effort of fireman (two of whom escaped personal harm when the roof collapsed), the fire spread quickly throughout the church, destroying everything.

The fire was well under way when the fire department received the alarm at 1:47pm. The fire raged for at least three hours as parishioners and friends were forced to stand by and watch helplessly. By 4:30pm, the blaze was extinguished.

Among the many losses were the church's treasured and irreplaceable pews, made of a now extinct type of chestnut wood, purchased from a church in Hartford, Connecticut.

Under the leadership of Father Bernier (who was assigned as pastor scarcely two months prior to the fire,) the parishioners of Immaculate Conception, wiped away their tears, rolled up their sleeves, and developed plans to build a new church. Fund raising, tithing, and the generosity of the church community produced the money needed to begin construction.

On **January 16, 1983**, the Most Reverend Jude Speyrer, Bishop of the Diocese of Lake Charles and Father Bernier broke ground for the new church at the site of old building.

On **January 29, 1984**, Bishop Speyrer returned to the parish to bless the new church and officiate at a combined **Mass of Dedication and 25th Anniversary Celebration.**

In 1988, Father Brunnert conducted a "Christmas List" canvass of parishioners to determine their needs and wishes for future growth. First priority was given to expansion of the parking lot, which was quickly accomplished.

1990's

On **July 7, 1990**, the Parish Council drafted a list of needs, including additional office space and a multi-purpose building with meeting rooms, recreational facilities, and a larger parish hall. At that time, the renovated rectory garage served as office space for parish

business.

The Building Committee worked with architects to develop plans and specifications for a new parish center which were presented to Bishop Speyrer in **January of 1993**. Bids were opened in March but exceeded budgeted funds. The Parish Council scaled back plans to construction of two buildings with a common roof. Bishop Speyrer gave his approval for the revised project in August.

On **Sunday, November 21, 1993**, ground-breaking ceremonies were conducted following 9:00am Mass. Plans for the construction of the complex, comprising a Youth Center and Administrative Offices along with refurbishments of existing facilities, was accepted on **September 15, 1994 and blessed by Bishop Speyrer in October of 1995**.

On **January 16, 1995**, Father Vecchio became pastor of the parish. Father Brunnert was reassigned to another parish.

The **Missionaries of La Salette** who have served as pastor are:

- **Reverend Henry Lenz, M.S. 1959-1962**
- **Reverend Francis C. Lundgren, M.S. 1962-1967**
- **Reverend James J. Shahrigian, M.S. 1967-1976**
- **Reverend Francis A. Fitzsimmons, M.S. 1976-1981**
- **Reverend Roland Bernier, M.S. 1981-1987**
- **Reverend William P. O'Brien, M.S. 1987**
- **Reverend Edward J. Brunnert, M.S. 1987-1995**
- **Reverend Egidio A. Vecchio 1995-1999**