

It was not until after 1960 that the parish obtained the properties across the alley from the rectory. Originally two houses stood on that half block, both occupied by members of the Tom and Clint Padgitt families. Over the years other families occupied the homes. The present convent, at 224 N. 14th Street, replaced the original Tom Padgitt home and has, in the past, been used by the parish as a youth building. It had extensive renovations in 1989 when it became the convent for the nuns in residence at St. Mary's. A room in the rear, with a separate entrance from the convent, has been made into a conference/meeting room.

The remaining structure on the block is the Parish Hall. It was originally a two-story home which was purchased by Msgr. John Kearns and renovated by contractor Joe Matustik to serve as a location for parish meetings and activities. Renovations included the removal of the second story, an addition on the 15th Street side to provide space for restrooms and a complete new oak floor over the old pine floor. St. Mary's Women's Guild provided new drapes and blinds throughout in 1989.

Growth of Catholicism in the Waco Area

Many Catholic parishes in Central Texas are outgrowths of St. Mary's. St. Francis on the Brazos was built in 1924 when the Bishop of the Diocese of Galveston, to which St. Mary's then belonged, saw a need for a church to serve the large Hispanic population of the community. By 1951, with 1700 families in St. Mary's Parish, St. Joseph's Parish was organized to serve families living east of the Brazos River. Two more parishes were formed after World War II: St. John's in East Waco in 1953 and Sacred Heart in South Waco in 1957. In 1968 a major division of the parish occurred when St. Louis Church was dedicated in what was then far North Waco. Evidence of the growth of Catholicism in the area was again apparent when, in 1983, St. Jerome's Parish was established in Hewitt. St. Eugene's in McGregor and St. Joseph's in Elk were originally missions of St. Mary's. The Catholic Student Center at Baylor University is assigned to St. Mary's Parish.

Thus, the Church of St. Mary's of the Assumption has been the well spring from which all other Catholic parishes and schools in the area flowed since 1870. To commemorate this achievement, the State of Texas has recognized it as an historical landmark. A plaque attesting to this historical achievement was installed on the present church building on August 26, 1990 — 121 years after the founding of the parish.

Other Catholic influences in Waco came about when, during the early part of this century, the Bishop of Galveston foresaw the growth of Catholicism in Central Texas and invited the Daughters of Charity to open a hospital in Waco. The hospital, renamed Providence Health Center, moved into a new modern facility in 1989 and is located on Medical Parkway in West Waco and continues to be operated by the Daughters of Charity.

The Regis Retirement Center, at 400 Austin Avenue, was established in 1963. In 1978 a new St. Elizabeth's Nursing Home was added to the retirement center. Both facilities were bequeathed to the Diocese of Austin by a benefactor. They were purchased in 1985 by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word and continue to be popular for both retirees and nursing home occupants.

St. Catherine's Residential and Health Care Center for Older Adults, which opened in December 1991, is located in the building that formerly housed Providence Hospital, at 18th Street and Colcord Avenue. It provides full nursing home care as well as residential assisted living facilities with services available from the Family Practice Center adjacent to the Center. It, too, is operated by the Daughters of Charity.