

In Spirit of Friendship...

a story of The Tabernacle Society.

This article was originally published as a series of 3 articles in the Guardian in September of 2010, discussing our parish Tabernacle Society and its interplay with our parish history. We invite and welcome all women of the parish to join us, continuing in the spirit of friendship. The references include three recounts of our history: 1) the earliest years recounted by Fr. Schaeken in 1875, 2) the Centennial version from 1937, and 3) a compilation for our 150th anniversary by Mrs Patricia Courtney in 1983. Guardian bulletins also told some of this story. This Summary and Invitation issued Fall 2010.

You might ask -- exactly what is a Tabernacle Society? Very simply put, this is a name for our parish altar society. What does the society do? It connects women of the parish, in a spirit of friendship. We cooperate to accomplish not only altar care, but other good things for our parish community and sometimes our community or world at large.

We are 94 years and counting! We were organized formally by Fr. Alphonse Sharp after he arrived to pastor Sacred Heart in 1916. Fr. Sharpe organized and created groups and societies within the parish which would create and sustain friendships and thus facilitate cooperation to develop our fast growing parish. Amazing cooperation has been proven through the 94 years of our existence. Some periods particularly define our place in parish history.

First was the period following the 1929 building of our church. Over a dozen years of erecting buildings on our "campus", groundbreaking of the church happened June 23, 1929--- just 3 months before the devastating October crash of the stock market on Wall Street. The years of the Great Depression followed. Many parishioners struggled to meet the basic needs of their families. They could not meet their well intended building pledges.

Sacred Heart and Dearborn struggled for survival. Ford Motor Company daily delivered meat and vegetables to the school, and Tabernacle Society women swept into action. They canned foods and made soup for the students and other hungry people. Conditions improved slowly but the mortgage debt remained. The parish invented creative fundraisers bringing folks to church in a fun way. These social activities knitted the parish together during the hard years. Tabernacle ladies participated by providing handmade sewn, quilted or food goods to be sold at booths at an annual so called Circus held on the parish grounds for several years. This Circus was a huge undertaking. It was held over a period of nine days in late June, and ended with the pulling of a Grand Prize raffle ticket for a Ford V-8. Generous donations such as Kelvinator stoves came from local merchants added to the raffle's appeal. It was surely an event for the entire community, and involved as many as 200 parishioners just to make it happen. Tabernacle Ladies met regularly to accomplish their goals for this event.

In a spirit of Friendship.....cont'd Part 2 of 3 Tabernacle expands post WW2

By 1940 the Tabernacle Society was nearly 25 years old. Although the economy improved by then , US involvement in World War II would shake the parish and cause the entire community of Dearborn to work together after Pearl Harbor's bombing. The war found many young men from Sacred Heart going off to serve their country. Too many would never return. People prayed, waited and were happy to see the end of the war in August of 1945. An explosive housing boom began, and the baby boom started. Tabernacle needed a change, in order to best serve the parish. Sacred Heart boundaries were expansive with borders running from Ford Road to VanBorn and Gulley to Southfield.

In early 1946, Tabernacle divided into districts called circles. This districting was meant to facilitate cooperation to service the parish via a neighborhood approach. Circles were neighborhood groups which met to provide church women both social opportunity and service opportunity . Women were asked to join their local circle. The circles were asked to create and promote just one event per year that would benefit the parish. This gave way to much creative thought and soon there were card parties, cotillion dances, fashion shows, even entertainment events offered to encourage parishioners and their friends to socialize while providing dollars support for Tabernacle goals, caring for the sanctuary and sacristy of the church, and second, provide assistance to the poor. The Tabernacle Society had accepted Cardinal Mooney's 1938's invitation and joined the National Council of Catholic Women. They accepted leadership positions as well. Circle memberships became a first step to encourage women to become more active in the church.

As time progressed into the fifties, many new local parishes were built to accommodate Dearborn's growth. Outlying circles were no longer needed because of changing parish borders. Families joined churches that were closer to them such as St Sebastian, St Martha , St John in Inkster. St Anselm, and St Joseph. However the remaining in parish circles were strong in number. In 1966, for example, the annual Tabernacle Installation Dinner for new officers was attended by 300 women!

Next part—Tabernacle finds its place in post Vatican II years

In a Spirit of Friendship---- *Last of 3 parts: Tabernacle finds its place in post Vatican II years*

It was the 1960's. Pope John XXIII convenes a Vatican council and the world changes. If you raised children or yourself grew up at Sacred Heart in Dearborn in that time period, you know that the 60's and 70's were turbulent years. Decisions to follow Vatican II reforms required a new look for most Catholic Church sanctuaries, and Sacred Heart was no exception. The once majestic but aloof altar and sanctuary area of the church was drastically changed. The new interior and how it came about caused heartbreak for some longtime parishioners who remembered the long struggle to pay down the debt of the original design was considered timeless.

Political climate changed and parochial schools were cut from state funding. Sacred Heart high school became debt ridden trying to sustain itself by Archdiocese dictate, which forced its closure. The change was hard but the parish moved on. New parish organization evolved as well. A parish council was formed and supported by a commission system. But where was Tabernacle to fit in this new structure?

Tabernacle did what it always did. It adjusted. The goal of friendship and cooperation continued, but just fell under the new structure. Altar care continued by Tabernacle Society ladies, but as part of the Worship Commission. A sacristan, recruited by Tabernacle, oversees altar care and attends Worship meetings. Tabernacle funding continues to be welcomed for vestments, altar linens and other items which maintain the beauty of the interior of our church. Similarly, community service work performed by Tabernacle ladies for decades still continues but now as a part of a Christian Service Commission. A representative of Tabernacle coordinates many charitable efforts each year and encourages Tabernacle membership to participate in the other numerous efforts of other groups as well.

In all this time-- has Tabernacle changed? Not really! It remains what it has always been. A cross section of women of Sacred Heart Parish joined in a Spirit of Friendship, seeking to cooperate in ways to benefit our parish. Would you like to join our group? We would love to see you at our October meeting! We have some interesting speakers and events planned for this year. Come and meet new friends. If you have been away for awhile, don't worry—we welcome you back! We are like an old shoe, easy to put back on!

Please join us!