

History of St. Agnes

Past

St. Agnes has a history which began over 100 years ago when a mission was formed in 1912 to accommodate a growing Catholic population south of St. Joseph Church. New Orleans Archbishop Blenk authorized the establishment of this mission which was to become the second Catholic Church within the city of Baton Rouge. While still in a mission status, a wooden church was erected on the corner of East Boulevard and St. Maximilian Street. This new church, dedicated to the virgin martyr, St. Agnes, was completed in 1913, and the first Mass was celebrated there on October 13, 1913. On February 9, 1917 St. Agnes was established as an independent parish by Archbishop Blenk and Father Edward Rombouts was installed as its first pastor.

The church was partially destroyed by a fire on July 3, 1918, but was rebuilt and enlarged to serve the growing congregation. In 1920 a large hall was built on the church grounds. With a look to the future, an entire city square was purchased in January, 1936. This tract of land was located two blocks north of the original church; it is the location of the present St. Agnes Church. Three wood-framed buildings were erected at this new location during 1936; these three structures served as the school and convent which were administered by the Dominican Sisters who arrived at St. Agnes in August, 1936.

On June 3, 1938, Father (later Monsignor) Patrick Gillespie became the third pastor at St. Agnes and remained in the parish to steer its continued growth for the next 44 years until his death on May 30, 1982. During Monsignor's long pastorate, additional property was purchased adjacent to the tract of land purchased in 1936, and the present church, rectory, convent, school, and gymnasium were constructed during the years 1946-1951. St. Agnes officially moved from its old location to its present location at the end of 1951.

Father John Spriggs, a Holy Ghost priest, arrived at St. Agnes in 1973 to assist Msgr. Gillespie. Father Spriggs became pastor at St. Agnes upon the death of Msgr. Gillespie. During his 22 years at St. Agnes, as well as the 16 years in which Msgr. Robert Berggreen served as pastor, a strong traditional Catholicism was maintained. During these years St. Agnes continued to grow, and Saint Mother Teresa established a mission staffed by her Missionaries of Charity at St. Agnes in 1985. A Chapel to honor Msgr. Gillespie was constructed in the former altar servers' sacristy and daily adoration was established in a God the Father Chapel which was constructed in the former convent building. A council of the Knights of Columbus was chartered in the parish and that Council has lent much support in various aspects of parish life especially in the area of security

Present

Today St. Agnes continues its strong traditional Catholicism and has both English and Latin Masses. The parish has become a place of spiritual and physical healing, a place of service, and a place of Catholic education. Monthly healing Masses are held in honor of St. Sharbel where his intercession is sought to heal both body and soul.

The Missionaries of Charity at St. Agnes continue their service to the "poorest of the poor" which St. Mother Teresa inspired during her earthly sojourn. From their soup kitchen these good nuns provide a hot meal daily to feed the hungry and the homeless who frequent the area around St. Agnes; they also provide overnight shelter for women who have no place to sleep at night. Through their visitations in many marginal homes, the sisters have become a real presence within the poor neighborhoods which abut the church grounds.

The parish provides Catholic education in various venues. The Parish School of Religion provides religious instruction to all the youth of the parish on a weekly basis. The Rite of Christian Initiation is provided for all who wish to explore the strong peace available to all through membership in Holy Mother, the Church, while Apologetic classes are available for those interested in deepening their knowledge of Catholic beliefs and traditions. A Children's Choir is in its infancy with the expectation of growth to help instill love for liturgical music within the young. An Adoration Chapel, open week days from 9 am to 3 pm, offers a haven in which adorers can better commune with Our Lord.

Future

Even as St. Agnes continues to provide a rich Catholic tradition to its parishioners, thought is being given to the future so that these traditions will continue to manifest themselves within these parishioner's hearts. The church has upgraded its sound system which markedly improves the volume and quality of delivery made from the altar. A projected project will be the upgrading of the lighting system within the church and throughout the grounds so that the element of safety is anticipated to be improved. Additional safety will also be provided through the construction of a parking lot built to specifically address the needs of the handicapped. A major innovation eagerly anticipated is the movement of all the parish offices into one locale through the renovation and transformation of the much under-utilized gymnasium into office suites, meeting rooms, and space for youth activities.