

The Past

by Anne Hacche

In collaboration with- Edith Watson, Betty Giltinan, Margaret Patterson, Josie Shepherd and many, many more!

How do you find out about the past? What was life like in Swansea, less than ten years after the end of the Second World War? You need to ask those with first-hand information, some now advanced in years or others who are able to share childhood memories. This article is based on conversations and notes submitted by parishioners who recall the early days of the parish now called Holy Cross.

‘The past is another country, they do things differently there’ (L.P Hartley)

Things were certainly different in 1954 when the first church, Our Lady Queen of the Universe, was built. In the years that followed the war, a combination of factors had resulted in the creation of new suburbs in Swansea. During the war many homes in the town had been bombed leaving residents homeless. After the war, the town's old, cramped, housing stock was cleared and replaced with large new housing developments. Catholics who moved out of Greenhill and the centre of the town at this time, relocated to places like Gendros or Penlan. They now had modern homes with appropriate amenities. New homes yes, but no church. At first the Catholic families in the area were served from St. Joseph's Church (now the Cathedral). Mass

was said where a room could be found- above Lloyds Bank in Fforestfach, or in a workingman's hut in Clwyd School for example. Gradually however, fundraising began and plans for a modest church were drawn up.

The parishioners were justifiably proud of their brand new church when it opened in 1954. The building had to be flexible as it served both as a church and parish hall. Parishioners had to be flexible too. The parish was a social centre as well as a spiritual one. Every time there was a function, kneelers were moved to the side of the hall, chairs stacked and a wooden partition, closed off the sanctuary. After each event the hall had to be cleaned and polished and returned to a fitting setting for Holy Mass. With three Masses on a Sunday and daily Mass each morning, this was no mean feat. The parish priest also needed to be flexible. When the church was first built Fr. Mc Cleary lived in a caravan in the church grounds! Parish sodalities were soon established- the Guild of St. Agnes, the Children of Mary, the Guild of St. Stephen, the Legion of Mary and the SVP.

Many people have commented that the UCM Union was a key organisation within the community. In July 1957, 60 mothers were enrolled into the UCM. The mothers were the backbone of the parish. They organised bazaars, jumble sales and functions for special occasions. They arranged children's parties and trips. The mothers were always behind the scenes supporting everything that happened in the parish. The community flourished. A presbytery was built and it was time to think about a new church. Fr. Flook, as he was then called, established a fund raising committee and plans for the new building were drawn up. Holy Cross Church was blessed and opened on the 8th December 1989.

The Prayer of Dedication read by Bishop Mullins that day pronounced the sacred purpose of the beautiful new building



Father in heaven, ---today we come before you, to dedicate to your lasting service this house of prayer, this temple of worship, this home in which we are nourished by your word and your sacraments.

And so it has always been a beautiful and bold symbol of our Christian faith. The building, fashioned in the shape of the Holy Cross, is a welcoming sign to local people and Catholics far and wide that God is revered here. Parishioners organised fund raising events in order to pay off the parish debt. Playing Bingo was one means by which funds were raised. At the end of a session of bingo people would donate books, and other items to be sold. All profits being given to the church. Gradually, the Charity Shop emerged as the vital fund raising mechanism of the community providing the parish with a much needed regular source of income. In 2002 Fr. Sebastian and Fr. Cyril came to minister to the faithful at Holy Cross. A new chapter in the life of the parish had begun. In the last 12 years we have been fortunate to welcome a number of priests from Kerala in the Indian subcontinent, a place where the Catholic faith flourishes in a dynamic, vibrant and inspiring way.,



Kerala has the highest pro capita number of priests in the world.

As vocations to the priesthood have declined in this country we have been blessed in our diocese with some of their number.

During this period of time we have also welcomed many new parishioners from all over the world. Families come to live in Wales for many reasons. Some are health care professionals with specialist expertise. Some have come to make a new start in life. Some have fled persecution in their home lands. Those who decide to make Holy Cross their spiritual home have one thing in common; they are all attracted to worship here by the warmth and inclusive outlook of the congregation and its ministers.

It is evident that during the past 60 years this Catholic community has developed in many ways that our forebears could never have imagined.

In the history of Catholic witness at Gendros there has been only one certainty- change. Imagine those early days for a moment when the people heard Mass cramped in an upper room. How different now, our beautiful, spacious church, a holy centre for prayer, devotion and celebration of the Mass.

