

Catholic Parish located in Cy-Fair will use Latin sacraments

By Lindsay Peyton | January 20, 2015



The Archbishop of Galveston-Houston's Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, center, breaks ground for Regina Caeli Parish, along with architect Jerry Tipps, left, the Rev. Paul Lockey of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church; the Rev. Charles Van Vliet of Regina Caeli Parish; and Frank Rynd, general counsel of the archdiocese. The parish will be devoted to Latin sacraments.

Designs are in the final phases for a new Catholic parish in the Cy-Fair area devoted exclusively to the traditional Latin rite sacraments from the pre-Vatican II 1962 missal.

Regina Caeli or "Queen in Heaven," Parish, will be the first such parish in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston in more than 40 years.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Dec. 20, and after the celebration, the first phase of construction began - preparing the 40-acre tract of rural property in northwest Houston near Fairbanks North Houston Road.

The congregation's pastor is the Rev. Charles Van Vliet.

"The Latin mass has been around the whole time, and there have certainly been a group of people attached to traditional rites," he said.

He said some enjoy the fact that the Latin Mass is always the same.

"You can come home to the Latin Mass," he said. "There's something really comforting about that."

The readings date back to the early church.

"It speaks to reverence and the presence of the Lord," he said. "There's real beauty to that."

Van Vliet said Regina Caeli is a "personal parish," which means any person who wishes to join may become a member or supporter. Membership is determined by individuals who are interested in attending Latin Mass - and not by the area where parishioners reside.

Local resident Betty Lee White donated the acreage to the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, said Van Vliet.

"She wanted it to be a church for the Latin Mass," he said. "Betty has been attending the Latin Mass for a long time," he said. "She has a real attachment to the Latin Mass. She remembers going to it as a child."

White's family had acquired the land in 1839, three years after Texas won its independence from Mexico. The original tract totaled 450 acres.

In the late 1930s, oil was discovered on the land. Various parcels have since been sold for development of subdivisions and businesses in the area.

Van Vliet has spent many days onsite overseeing its progress, even jumping on a tractor to help clear the land.

He said there were a few issues that had to be resolved before construction of a church could begin.

"The property was land-locked behind four neighborhoods," he said. "There was no access to a main thoroughfare."

While the situation was being resolved, Van Vliet has operated his parish under St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, 6646 Addicks Satsuma Road, with the permission of the church's pastor, Paul Lockey.

"It was a generous offer to give us a home for as long as we needed," Van Vliet said. "It's been a happy arrangement. We ended up staying longer than we anticipated."

It took two years for the final contract approving the new religious order.

Regina Caeli was formally established as a parish on the Feast of the Assumption on Aug. 15, 2013.

The Feast of the Assumption celebrates the Virgin Mary's being assumed body and soul into heaven, according to Catholic doctrine.

"As soon as we got the official parish status, we were able to start the capital campaign," Van Vliet said. "Donations were already coming in."

The parish has raised enough to start construction on the road and the first building, a gatehouse, which will serve temporarily as the main church for the parish.

When funds are gathered to complete the rest of the parish campus, the building will be converted for use as a parish hall.

The plans call for eight buildings, including a chapel, educational buildings and a recreation center. Van Vliet decided on a Texas Mission style for the architecture, inspired by trips he took to San Antonio.

Jerry Tipps, president and CEO of Tipps Architecture, is serving as architect for the project. He said the full project could take 10- to- 15 years to complete.

"The first three building designs are completed," Tipps said. "We're going to build simply and redress it as the budget expands."

He said the Texas Mission theme will be followed through the stone and stucco exteriors, as well as other design details. Tipps said Van Vliet felt the style was fitting for a property that dates to the Texas revolution.

"Father liked the historical context," Tipps said. "One thing he also liked was the idea of a perimeter fence with interior courtyards. That's the chief element of the overall design."

He said the buildings are designed to be flexible until the full campus is developed.

"All of the spaces will be double-duty," Tipps said. "We want it to feel like a church, but we don't want to put a lot into it that we'll have to remove later."

Van Vliet invites the community to visit the church once the construction is complete.

"Anyone can attend a mass, even if they are just curious," he said. "Everyone is welcome."

Van Vliet said it is important to offer a Latin Mass and parish life in the archdiocese.

"We're here to help people have a place in union with Rome, attached to a local bishop, that provides sacraments to the people," he said.

"To run a parish is more than just offering mass. You take care of the whole person - body and soul."