



# 1911-2011

## A LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY...

Throughout the years Epiphany has been true to our Mission Statement:

“We the people of the Church of the Epiphany strive to be a peaceful and welcoming parish. We strive to be mutually supportive of the diverse communities. We strive to show compassion without distinction of age, gender, race or culture. Epiphany seeks to be a caring and loving community ever-growing in faith formation.”

### *From Mission to Parish...*

Our church was born as a mission church of Saint John the Evangelist. Archbishop Patrick Riordan established Epiphany to serve the growing number of settlers from European descent that had been moving to the Crocker Amazon and Excelsior districts from the Mission, Visitation and North Beach areas. Even back then, Epiphany strived to support and welcome the diverse community composed of German, Irish, and Italians. For them, it meant that they no longer had to walk to Saint John’s or Saint Michael’s parishes to attend mass.

The original church was built on the southwest corner of Russia Avenue and Paris Street. The wood frame building with a shingle roof seated about three hundred people. Archbishop Riordan dedicated it on January 21, 1911. The total cost for the building including the lots was \$18,631.40! The Rectory was at 33 Persia and served as a multi-purpose center for parish events, “whist” cards fundraising parties and Religious Education classes for the neighborhood children taught by the Sisters of the Holy Family. The pastor in charge of the mission was Fr. Peter D. Brady.

As an ever growing, loving and caring community, Epiphany became a parish to serve the growing population of the area in 1914. The first pastor was Father James Stokes. He served until 1922. It was during that year that Corpus Christi, the former Italian National Parish, became a territorial parish, changing the boundaries of Epiphany Parish. The original building was now too small to accommodate everyone. Father Patrick Ryan, a native from Ireland who was ordained in San Francisco, became our second pastor. He decided to move the church to a new lot purchased by the Archdiocese for \$24,011. It was situated on an entire city block, bordered by Naples, Vienna, Amazon and Italy. The original building was split in half. The sections were put on logs and barrels and pushed up Russia Street, and set up on Naples Street, twenty-three feet apart. A new construction joined the two halves. When the building reopened the seating capacity had increased from around 300 to 480 to accommodate the growing parish population. The rectory moved from Persia to the corner of Amazon and Vienna Streets and was dedicated on January 5, 1923. At that time, Epiphany’s boundaries were:

EAST-the hillsides of what it is now called McLaren Park

NORTH-From the hills west on Brazil Avenue to Mission Street, South on Mission to Onondaga Avenue, West on Onondaga to Ocean Avenue and West on Ocean to San Jose Avenue.

WEST-South of San Jose Avenue to Geneva Avenue

SOUTH-East on Geneva to Alemany, South on Alemany to Naglee St. East on Naglee to Mission Street and East on Lowell Street to the hills.

The Excelsior district also continued to welcome settlers. More immigrants from European descent began to call the Crocker Amazon area their home and Epiphany became a focal gathering point for many of them. Organizations such as the Italian Catholic Federation were established in the parish to serve their needs. Whole families moved into the area and their children attended Catechism classes. Soon it became evident to Fr. Ryan and the parish staff that a need for a school was a priority.

On August 16, 1938, Bishop Armstrong from Sacramento, substituting for Archbishop John J. Mitty, opened the doors to the new School of the Epiphany. They welcomed 239 students in grades Kindergarten through Seventh. The instruction in the building on Naples and Italy Street was commissioned to the Sisters of the Presentation and Sister Mary Amibilis Meehan was the first principal.

In September of 1940, Father Ryan died suddenly after serving Epiphany for eighteen years. He was greatly mourned by the community. Archbishop John J. Mitty installed Monsignor Maurice O'Keefe as Epiphany's third pastor.

### **The O'Keefe years...**

Under Monsignor Maurice J. O'Keefe's direction the church continued to grow just like the neighborhood it served. More and more children from Italian, Irish and German descent attended the school. By 1945 there were 545 children attending and 200 had to be turned away. In 1949 construction for a school expansion and a convent for the sisters was completed. Epiphany became one of the largest parochial schools in the archdiocese-a distinction that still holds true today.

The expanded church building also became too small to hold the numbers of parishioners attending Mass. It became obvious that a new temple needed to be built. With the approval of the plans by Archbishop John Mitty, the old church was again put on rollers and moved to the back of the lot where the original convent used to be. It was set facing Vienna Street. Once religious services began in the new building the old mission structure was again "recycled" and became the Gym or Athletic Activities Building, the site for many glorious games in the history of our parish.

Construction of the new temple took more than a year to complete. Monsignor O'Keefe kept a watchful eye on the construction and the quality of the materials used. Marble was shipped from Italy and the Epiphany mosaic was made and shipped from Germany. These materials were chosen over simple wood, as it was believed to be better flame-retardants. The bare building held the parish festival with booths, balloons, pony rides and popcorn sales. Finally in 1952, Archbishop Mitty opened the new church. The new building could seat around 840 people.

Monsignor O'Keefe stayed at Epiphany from 1940 to 1969. During his tenure as pastor, organizations such as the Men's Club and the Ladies' Guild helped with the school's extracurricular activities. Attendance at masses continued to increase. Epiphany became one of the largest parishes in the city. The people in the pews were no longer from European descent, but a dramatic change in demographics had happened in the neighborhood. Yet, true to its mission statement, it continued to serve and support the diverse communities as the parish grew. One example of this mission is the Latino community. On October 1965 a group of Hispanics made arrangements to have a Spanish Mass on Saturday afternoons. The mass began to be celebrated in the CYO (now O'Keefe) Hall and the Grupo Hispano-Americano de la Epifanía was born. To this day, it is one of the oldest Latino groups in the archdiocese.

### **The end of the Century...**

Fr. Lawrence Krause became the Pastor from 1969 to 1976. School and mass attendance continued to increase during his tenure. The faces and languages in the community also continued to change. The parish was blessed with the new infusion of people from the Philippines and Latin-America. Fr. Krause always welcomed all newcomers. After he retired in 1976 he lived in the priests' house for several years and helped out in the community and with masses.

Fr. Patrick McCarthy came to Epiphany in 1976. He, like his predecessors, also welcomed all cultures and traditions. The parish community continued to be a mosaic pot of nationalities. During his years as pastor there were up to seven masses on Sundays. The whole community attended ethnic celebrations such as Saint Patrick, Guadalupe and Flores de Mayo. Spanish Masses became part of the regular mass schedule and moved from Saturday afternoons to Sundays at 1:30PM and in December of 1982 to the 11:10AM slot. The CCD office relocated to the Parish Center building on the northeast corner of Italy and Naples. Classes on Saturday mornings filled the school's classrooms with Public School children. People from different backgrounds and nationalities began to participate more and more in liturgical celebrations. There were more lay teachers providing instruction at the school and the extra curricular activities such as Boy Scouts, Altar servers and sports programs at the "Bill Gillheaney" gym made our parish an even more vibrant active and recognized community than in the past. In

1989 and as part of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish the pipe organ was replaced and a new organ was installed through a grassroots capital campaign.

### *A new millennium..*

Monsignor Bruce Dreier, a former associate during Fr. Mc Carthy's years, was appointed by Archbishop John Quinn as the sixth Pastor at Epiphany in 1992. Fr. Bruce improved the infrastructure of our church. A whole new capital campaign to add more classrooms, a library and to replace the old "Gillheaney" gym became what is now Nano Nagle Hall. Our state of the art gym continues to be the host of many of the CYO and Flame tournaments. The Rectory was moved to Regis House. During his term as pastor, the school had its first lay principal ever and the students began to use more and more computers. Father Bruce led the parish into the new millennium, introduced Children's Liturgy and continued to open the doors to all. The International Dinner was established during his term in order to recognize the diversity of our parish community.

In the year 2004, Archbishop William Levada appointed Fr. Eugene Tungol to become our current Pastor. Fr. Tungol, a former associate pastor during Fr. Dreier's term, returned to Epiphany after serving eleven years as Pastor at St. Augustine in South San Francisco. He has reorganized the Parish Council, and like his predecessors, has opened the doors and acknowledged the contributions from all newcomers. He has welcomed the more than thirty organizations or groups, including the Knights of Columbus, the Pilipino Consultative Board and promoted Small Christian communities. In 2010 Archbishop George Niederauer reappointed him as our pastor for six more years.

Today's Epiphany continues to be a vibrant community of communities united by service to those in need, the respect of our differences and by the love of God. Our Saint Vincent de Paul Society provides hundreds of bags with food for the needy. The Social Responsibility Committee and the youth groups have been walking the Aids Walk and the March for Life for several years. The Council of the Knights of Columbus continues to serve and the coaches and teachers at the school keep our youth focused. Our choirs, Small Christian communities and faith formation classes bring our lives closer to God's path.

As we celebrate 100 years, let's share our stories, trials and accomplishments with the youth of our parish, so that they can continue making Epiphany an even stronger community. Lets continue to be guided by the star, look at our past, reflect on our present and thank God for allowing us to be part of this caring and loving parish community of the Church of the Epiphany; a place we call home.