



1983 - Celebrating Thirty-five Years - 2018

Back to the Beginning

On a bright Sunday morning, November 21, 1982, the Feast of Christ the King, Archbishop Philip M. Hannan, the Ordinary of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Louisiana, accompanied by about twenty priest, thirty-five Dominican and Salesian Sisters, elected public officials, including our Congresswoman, Lindy Boggs, and representatives of the Archdiocesan Education Department, blessed the new St. John Bosco Middle School, and then proceed to anoint, bless, and inaugurate the newly constructed St. John Bosco Catholic Church. The new Church and School are located in a very large new subdivision with 4,000 single houses with a thousand more in the building, named Woodmere, Harvey just west of the famous Harvey Canal and about a ten minute ride from St. Rosalie Church. The Woodmere Subdivision is populated by young families, many college educated, professionals, including engineers, lawyers, teachers, etc. There are many children and teenagers just waiting for the Salesians. With so many people in in the Woodmere Subdivision, it was inevitable that a new Catholic Parish would be created. The mandate to do this was given to the Salesians of St. John Bosco, who had been active on the West Bank for 50 years. Besides, part of the subdivision was within the southern boundary of St. Rosalie Parish, staffed by the Salesians for the previous 19 years.

Negotiations began in 1977 between the Archbishop of New Orleans in whose jurisdiction the Subdivision was located, and the Salesians for the Salesians to accept the Subdivision as a mission of St. Rosalie Parish. In 1978 Fr. Salvatore Isgro, then the Provincial, accepted that arrangement.

The fast growth of the new area necessitated the building of a church and the extension of St. Rosalie School, which now had about 800 students enrolled. The church was almost two years in the planning stage and required almost one year to build. The architect was Mr. Alvin Hotard, and the Clover Construction Company as the builder. The church seats approximately 700 people.

The new Church of St. John Bosco is a very pleasant blend of the contemporary and traditional styles. It is in earthen-colored brick, outside and inside, with wide porcelain trim. It has two large mirror-glaze windows facing the north and south, allowing for dramatic views of the exterior. There are nine beautiful faceted-glass windows depicting symbols of the seven Sacraments, and portraits of St. Joseph and St. Dominic, the latter in honor of the Dominican Sisters, who are in charge of the

school. The new church contains exquisite furnishings, including in hand-carved wood, a large (7' x 12') Risen Christ on a cross, Stations of the Cross, Statues of Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco, St. Joseph, and the Sacred Heart. In beautiful marble (Bottecino and Allegante) especially commissioned from Florence, Italy, are the altar, the lecture, the baptistry, and holy water fonts. The Mensa of the altar is a glorious slab of highly polished Bottecino marble weighing 1,250 lbs. The new church includes a St. Joseph Chapel, seating for about 60 people and is used for daily Mass, cry room, brides room, and lecture room.

The first Mass, with the enthronement of the Blessed Sacrament, was held on Sunday, October 15, 1982, in the presence of 1,300 people who crowded into the church. As noted above, the church was formally blessed by Archbishop Hannan on Sunday, November 21, 1982, and at the same time the Archbishop blessed the new school. Many dignitaries attended. Lunch was at the Woodmere Club.

The Woodmere Subdivision became a parish in its own right with the Archbishop's official decree of June 16, 1983, and on that same day Fr. Emil Fardellone, SDB was officially appointed the first Pastor.

The St. John Bosco Church and School are situated on a seven-acre tract of land, containing large cypress trees, and immediately next to a seven acre tract recreational park (with baseball diamonds) operated by Jefferson Parish. Together, the two seven acre plots resemble a fourteen-acre park. Nearby are also eight large tennis courts, an olympic swimming pool, and a private clubhouse. The church plus all furnishings cost close to \$800,000, and the school cost of \$550,000. In less than two years over a million dollars in cash had been raised. The church was completely paid for before it was blessed.

During the building of the church, the new Middle School was started. It contains ten classrooms, a large library, a large science laboratory, extensive administrative offices, and a teacher's lounge. The first students entered after Thanksgiving recess in November, 1982.

The new rectory was completed by the Feast of St. John Bosco, January 31, 1983. The first and founding Pastor, Fr. Emil Fardellone, moved in on that day. The rectory is a Bellwood type home built by Sunrise homes and it has four bedrooms. The garage was altered into parish offices, and a new carport plus an enclosed patio were built.

An interesting footnote to this parish history is that the founder of the Clover Construction Company, which built the St. John Bosco Church and School, Mr. Hugh O'Connor, was raised as a boy in Hope Haven, which was then operated by the Salesians. He did not know that 50 years later he would build a church in honor of the Saint whom he learned to love as a boy.

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