

We have been worshipping in our “new” church on Flamingo Drive since June 1992. As early as 1988 it became apparent that the “old” church was simply not big enough. Engineers found that the structure would not lend itself to additions. Street side parking would still be needed. The land for a new church and a seniors residence had been purchased (1959) at the same time as the land for the school (built in 1961-62) and so it was seen as a natural progression of events that this land would be used to build a new church. The pastor at the time - Fr. Fred Bechely - initiated a building preparation process; committees were formed and meetings of interested parishioners began. A sum of money which had been collected over time and held at the Chancery Office was available. With the amount of money pledged as a result of the meetings, the estimated sale value of the “old” church, the rectory and a second residence next to the rectory on Duke St., Bishop Tonnos agreed that a new church could be supported. Plans were already in the works by this time and architects were chosen. More parish meetings were held and approvals received. A building committee was formed. The ground was blessed in 1991. Building got underway.

Some parishioners whose parents and grandparents had made sacrifices to build and maintain the “old” church were reluctant to see all the historical artifacts abandoned. They negotiated retaining many of the beautiful statues, the small altar with the Lord’s Supper carved at the front (used in our weekday St. Joseph Chapel), stained glass windows, etc. that would otherwise have been lost. Many of these are now in the hall, chapel and library. (The hall, chapel and library were recently named after the statues from the “old” church occupying those spaces; stained glass nameplates have recently been created for all three spaces).

The worship space in the present church was designed to hold at least 500 people - the sight lines aided by a sloped floor, the ceiling supported without pillars (hence the long central beams) and the seating semi-circular around a large raised sanctuary. The organ – purchased from St. Pius X Parish in Brantford – was placed in a ‘pit’ so as not to interfere with the view of the sanctuary. Great attention was given to the acoustics and lighting. Exposed wood was placed throughout the church - either oak indicating strength, walnut or maple (all indigenous to the area) and all found in the sanctuary (altar, tabernacle, lectern) and in the baptismal font at the inside doors of the church. The Spanish cross - in honour of the country of origin of St. Teresa of Avila - would be used both inside the church (on the altar, lectern and baptismal font) and on the high front columns of the outside of the church. From start to finish the process took close to five years.

The Resurrected Christ on the wall behind the altar is portrayed with Jesus holding his crown of thorns while reaching with the other hand to His Father in heaven - symbolizing victory of life over death. The scene below this depicts both Calvary and the empty tomb. The pregnant Mary, off to one side, depicts the Virgin with one hand resting on her body and the other extended as if to invite the onlooker to feel the movement of

the child within. The statue of St. Teresa of Avila expressing wonder and awe appears in the gathering space. All are sculptures by Tim Schmalz. A more recent artistic addition created by Tim is the Calvary scene on a pedestal behind the altar. When the processional cross bearing the crucified Christ is put in place at the beginning of Mass, the scene is complete.

For further reference and information please refer to *St. Teresa of Avila Parish - The First 100 Years in Elmira, 1889 to 1989* and the insert in the 2002 Tenth Anniversary Parish Photo Directory. Both available in the church library.