

¡Viva Cristo Rey!

An Oral History of the Roman Catholic
Community in the Flats of Lower East Austin

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

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Dedication

To the community of Cristo Rey Catholic Church
in the Flats of Lower East Austin

I am humbled to have served as your shepherd
during 26 months of great growth and vitality.

I love you with the kind affection
of a proud father.

Table of Contents

A Note from the Editor	i
Preface	1
A Bold Theological Statement	1
The Perspectival Nature of History	2
The Feeble Nature of Human Memory	3
Reconstructing the Past	4
The Two Crowns	5
Fasten Your Seatbelt!	5
Five Flags Over Lower East Austin: The Context for the Birth & Growth of the Mexican Population in Central Texas	7
Five Flags Over Austin	7
Before the First Flag: The Indigenous People of Central Texas	8
The First Flag: The Kingdom of Spain	8
The Syncretism of Roman Catholicism with Indigenous Beliefs	9
The Flag That Did Not Reach Austin:	
The Kingdom of France	10
Life in the Northern Expanse of New Spain	10
The Second Definite Flag: The Republic of Mexico	11
The Third Definite Flag: The Republic of Texas	12
Confrontations with the First Settlers	12
The Beauty of Central Texas	14
Waterloo Becomes the Capital City of Austin.	14
The Fight Over Austin Continues	17
The Catholic Church's First Purchase of Land in Austin	18
The Fourth Definite Flag: The United States of America	18
The Fifth Definite Flag: The Confederate States of America	19
From Slavery to Segregation	19
Where Are the Mexicans?	20

A Marginal Existence:	
The <i>Mexicano</i> Community in Downtown Austin	21
The <i>Mexicanos</i> of Central Texas	21
The First <i>Mexicanos</i> Arrive in Austin	22
The Shanties Beside the City Dump	23
On the Banks of the Rising Colorado River	23
Memories of the <i>Mexicano</i> District in Downtown Austin	24
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church:	
The Spiritual Center of the Downtown Mexican District	27
Being Pressured Out of Downtown Austin	27
The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Arrive in Austin	30
Treatment of the <i>Mexicanos</i> in Austin	31
Pushed to the Flood Plain:	
The Life of the Mexican Community in the Flats of Lower East Austin	33
<i>Mexicanos</i> in East Austin	33
The European Immigrants of Lower East Austin	34
So Few Mexicans in the Flats	35
The Elite on East First Street	37
The Floods of 1935 and 1936	37
The <i>Mexicanos</i> Arrive in the Flood-Prone Flats	39
The Mexican “Slums” of Buena Vista	39
Clearing the Mexican Slum: The Santa Rita Courts	40
The Availability of Property in East Austin	42
Memories of Life in Lower East Austin	44
Memories of Life in Buena Vista	45
The Unforgettable Stench of the Matanza	46
“Do You Realize What We’ve Been Through?”	
Early Treatment of the Mexican and Mexican-American Community	49
Paying the Price for Being “Brown”	49
Overt Segregation	51
Discrimination at School	52

An Attempt to Erase “Brownness”	53
A “Brown” School and a “Brown” Park	55
Battles Waged	56
Battles with Lice?	57
Reduced to Picking Cotton	57
Migrant Workers	59
Living in Poverty	60
Illiteracy among the <i>Mexicano</i> Community	61
An Unskilled and Semi-Skilled Work Force	62
The Military as a More Popular Option	63
Few Graduating from High School	64
Few Going to College	66
The Role of Education in Creating a Different Future	66
“Do You Realize What We’ve Been Through?”	66
A New Spiritual Center in the Flats:	
The Cristo Rey Chapel and Mission Church	68
The “ <i>Capilla de Cristo Rey</i> ”	68
The Original Mission Church of Cristo Rey	72
Expanding the Old Mission Church	75
Memories inside the Old Mission Church	79
The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate at Our Lady of Guadalupe	81
A Support Group for Men: The <i>Sociedad del Santo Nombre</i>	82
A Ministry for Women: The Altar and Rosary Society	86
Working Hard for the Church: Tamales and Queen Contests	87
The First Resident Priest: Sleeping in the Sacristy	89
Cristo Rey is Declared a Catholic Parish	91
The Ministry of the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco	91
Memories of the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco	93
Memories of Father Olaizola	94
A Ministry for Young Ladies: The <i>Hijas de María</i>	95
Buying and Selling the House on the Southeast Corner	97
The Ministry of Father O’Connor	98

The Departure of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate	99
The Beginning of a Sixteen-Year Love Affair:	
The Ministry of Father Victor Goertz and Associates	100
The First Diocesan Priest Reports to Cristo Rey	100
Father Goertz's First Year: 1955-1956	102
<i>Early Jamaicas at Cristo Rey</i>	104
Expansion of the Parish Rectory	104
The Arrival of Father Frank Briganti	105
Early Parish Staff and Volunteers at Cristo Rey	108
The Cristo Rey Neighborhood in 1955-1956	109
The Legion of Mary: A Ministry for Young Men	110
Memories of the Mariettes	112
Father Goertz is Named a Doctor of Canon Law	113
The Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church	113
Early Vocations to Religious Life and Priesthood	115
Early Seminarians at Cristo Rey	117
A "Love Affair"	117
A Magnificent Edifice for Christ the King:	
The Building of Cristo Rey Catholic Church	119
Dreaming of a New Church	119
The Launch of a Pledge Drive	122
Securing the Necessary Financing	124
Let's Build!	125
Building a New Church	126
Inside the New Church	127
The Dedication of the New Church	129
Benefactors of the New Cristo Rey Church	131
Parish Ministries in 1959	134
A Gilded Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe	134
Getting Involved at Cristo Rey:	
A Multiplication of Ministries	136
The <i>Cursillo</i> Movement Comes to Cristo Rey	136
Ventures into Journalism	140

Outreach to Teenagers	141
A New Kindergarten Program	144
The Birth of the Weekly Sunday Breakfast	144
The Catholic Lay Mission Corps Comes to Cristo Rey	146
A Difficult Winter for the Priests of Cristo Rey	148
Father Everett Trebtoske is Assigned to Cristo Rey	149
The Arrival of Father Trebtoske	150
The Departure of Father Briganti and the Arrival of Father Dokupil	150
The Cristo Rey Liturgical Center	152
The Go-Go Series	157
A Growing Community	159
The Priest with the Mercedes Benz	160
Hints of a Dangerous Neighborhood	160
The Liturgical Changes of the Second Vatican Council	164
Diocesan Sisters in the Cristo Rey Neighborhood	166
The Cristo Rey Montessori School	167
Media Attention for Cristo Rey	167
Cristo Rey's Involvement in the "War on Poverty"	167
The Birth of the St. Vincent de Paul Society	169
The Building of a New Parish Center and the Expansion of the Rectory	170
The CR Club: Formed to Fundraise	171
The Departure of Father Trebtoske	171
<i>"¡Viva la Raza!"</i>	
The Mexican-American Community Begins to Organize	173
Still Smarting from the Poll Tax	173
Early Attempts to Organize Money:	
The Cristo Rey Catholic Credit Union	174
Early Attempts to Influence City Council	174
Early Attempts to Unionize	175
Large Numbers from the Cristo Rey Neighborhood Flock to Economy Furniture	176

The Role of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in the Economy Furniture Strike	178
“Unduly Influenced by a Priest”	182
The Austin <i>Chicano Huelga</i>	183
A Visit by César Chávez	184
The Economy Furniture Strike Comes to an End	185
The First Hispanics in Austin Seek Public Office	186
The Arrival of Father Charles and Father Charles	188
Responding to the Needs of Neighborhood Residents	189
Ministry at Cristo Rey Catholic Church in the Late 1960s	190
The Censure of Father Davis	192
Organizing Priests	192
A Stand-Off at Cristo Rey	193
“Much More American than Mexican”	
Cristo Rey Catholic Church in the 1970s and 1980s	197
The Pastorate of Father Dan Villanueva	197
Memories of Father Louis Pavlicek	201
Frustration with the Austin Police Department	202
The <i>Centro Chicano</i>	203
The Brown Berets	203
Memories of Father Albert Ruiz	205
A Dangerous Neighborhood, Still?	207
A Neighborhood Immersed in <i>Curanderismo</i>	207
Memories of Father Xavier Guttenberger	208
A New Noise in the Neighborhood:	
The Holly Street Power Plant	208
Memories of Father John Driscoll	210
“Church-shopping” in 1975	213
A Parish Divided	213
Another New Noise in the Neighborhood:	
Boat Races on Town Lake	215
Organizing Neighborhood Associations	216
The Chancellor as Pastor: A Lacuna in Parish History	217

A Member of the Cristo Rey	
Maintenance Staff Joins the Seminary	220
The Pastorate of Father Albert Ruiz (1983-1984)	222
A Cristo Rey Catechist is Ordained to the Priesthood	224
The Mexican Community Comes Home to Cristo Rey:	
The Pastorate of Father Kirby Garner	226
The Arrival of Father Kirby Garner	226
Inheriting a Debt-Free Parish	228
The Mexican Community Comes Home to Cristo Rey	229
The Cristo Rey Staff	231
Memories of Parish Ministries	233
Memories of the <i>Jamaica</i>	234
The Flourishing of a New Era	234
Memories of Father Garner	235
Memories of an Unidentified Priest (1984)	236
Memories of Father Irudayam (1985-1986)	237
Memories of Father Daniel Helminiak (1986-1988)	238
Memories of Father Michael Sis (1987-1988)	239
Memories of Father John Boiko (1989)	239
Memories of the <i>Hermanos de Juan Diego</i>	240
Memories of Father James O'Connor (1990)	241
Memories of Father Danny García (1990-1991)	242
The Departure of Father Garner	244
The Mexican Community Flourishes at Cristo Rey:	
The Conventual Franciscan Friars	
at Cristo Rey Catholic Church	245
The Arrival of the Conventual Franciscans	245
Turbulent Years	246
The Beginning of Nine Years with "Hermano Kerry"	248
The Saint Francis of Assisi Joy Group	249
Huge Jamaicas	250
The Cristo Rey Neighborhood in the 1990s	251
Memories of the First Franciscan Priests	251

Memories of Brother Kerry Guillory	252
Memories of Father John Elmer	253
The Arrival of Father Lawrence Mattingly	253
A Place of Positive Treatment for the Recently-Arrived	254
The Birth of New Ministries and of Leaders' Meetings	255
The Christian Family Movement	256
From St. Vincent de Paul Society to Social Ministry	258
Leaders Meetings	259
The Dream of Expanding the Escuelita	260
La FUENTE Learning Center	262
Expansion of the Ministry of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians	264
Youth Ministry at Cristo Rey	265
Bringing Latin American Traditions to Austin	270
New Music and Décor for Cristo Rey	270
Cristo Rey's Influence on Diocesan Ministries	271
The Legacy of Antolín Aguirre	272
The Legacy of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians Family Catechesis	274
<i>The Cristo Rey Herald</i>	274
Helping Young People with Addictions	275
The Legacy of the Conventual Franciscan Friars	276
The Deacons of Cristo Rey Catholic Church	278
Parish Staff at Cristo Rey Catholic Church	278
The Legacy of Father Lawrence Mattingly	279
The Departure of the Conventual Franciscan Friars	280
Unlucky Thirteen:	
The Mexican Community is Chased from Cristo Rey	283
The Thirteenth Pastor	283
The Homecoming	284
The Suffering Caused by Father Jesus	285
Questionable Decisions	287
The Bishop of Austin Steps In	288

Memories of Father Rito Dávila	289
Through the Eyes of a Young Man	290
The Parish's Financial Situation Exposed	291
Blow Up in the Parish Office	293
The Demand for the Pastor's Resignation	297
The Pastor Disappears	299
From Villain to Saint	301
The Caged Bird Sings	301
Cristo Rey Catholic Church "Tu Casa":	
The Pastorate of "Father Obama"	304
"Father Obama"	304
26 Months of Great Activity	305
The Rebirth of Stewardship	308
Restoring Property & Facilities	309
Cristo Rey Staff	310
Dealing with the Former Pastor's Family	311
Associate Pastors	312
Deacons	312
The Pastoral and Finance Councils	313
Cristo Rey Ministries	313
The <i>Honorable Cuerpo de Seguridad</i>	315
The Children's Liturgy of the Word	316
The Oratory of St. John Bosco	317
Cristo Rey "Tu Casa"	317
"The Community of Traditions"	317
"The Majesty of Mariachi Masses"	319
Cristo Rey Healing Services	320
<i>Christus Rex</i> Awards	320
New Saints at Cristo Rey	324
An Unforgettable Pilgrimage to Cristo Rey	325
VIDES+USA Missioners at Cristo Rey	325
<i>Sí Se Puede</i> Learning Center	325
Cristo Rey Institute of Spirituality,	

Theology and Institutional Leadership	326
Plans Scuttled for New Parish Office	327
Public Differences with the New Bishop of Austin	327
The Legacy of Father Jayme Mathias	329
The Great Lacuna in the History of Cristo Rey Catholic Church:	
The Conventual Franciscan Friars of Mexico	332
A Downward Spiral	332
A New Era of Conservatism	334
Persecution of Holy Family Catholic Church	334
The Legacy of the Conventual Franciscans of Mexico	335
Cristo Rey Births a New Community:	
The “Unnecessary Schism” of Holy Family Catholic Church	336
Discovering a New Way of Being Catholic	336
The Holy Family Spirit	339
An Unnecessary Schism	340
References	341
Interviews	343
Appendix A: Pastors, Associate Pastors, Deacons, Religious Brothers and Religious Sisters at Cristo Rey	348
Appendix B: “Models of Service” and “Models of Generosity”	353
Appendix C: Parish Love Notes	372
Index of Surnames	394

A Note From the Editor

“Everything happens for a reason.” That’s what many of us are taught to believe. That phrase sums up all glib, comforting responses to the travesties and tragedies of life. It highlights remarkable synchronicities, and its future-oriented words keep us looking to the future, to understand the purpose and meaning of past and present events. It also helps to explain why this history of a Roman Catholic parish community is written by “outsiders.”

Time indeed flies. 22 years ago, in 2000, I was an “insider” of the Roman Catholic Church. As a young deacon, I was just recently re-assigned to Cristo Rey Catholic Church in East Austin, where I had completed a nine-month internship in youth ministry four years earlier. In 2000, Cristo Rey was celebrating its 50th anniversary with great pomp and circumstance, in the presence of its bishop, John McCarthy, inaugurating a lovely, large bronze of Our Lady of Guadalupe and breaking ground for a new educational center.

Ten years later, by grace of God, I served as Pastor of Cristo Rey. Knowing that the parish was celebrating its 60th anniversary, I thought it would be nice to publish an updated history of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, since all earlier attempts contained several lacunae. I interviewed nearly 70 people at the time. Learning a much deeper history of the parish and its community was an exciting adventure! Unfortunately, I was doing all this during a time when I was alone in serving 4,000 to 5,000 people each Sunday. I celebrated six Sunday Masses from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., then fell into a deep sleep at the rectory, rising to summon the strength to celebrate an additional two Sunday evening Masses at 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. As if that weren’t enough, I was racing to complete the thesis for my Master of Arts in Philanthropy and Development, the remaining courses for my Master of Business Administration, and the dissertation for my Doctorate in Philosophy. Needless to say, I was unable to complete that updated history of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 2010. But “everything happens for a reason,” right?

Another intriguing event occurred in 2010: the archconservative “Rottweiler of God,” Papa Ratzinger [Pope Benedict XVI] named a conservative bishop—the most glowing words I can summon at the moment—to lead the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin. All

progressives in all Catholic institutions in Austin were now on a collision course with all who aligned themselves with the Roman papacracy at that time. Aim was taken at Roman Catholic theologians and academics. (The stories that could be told by our friends at St. Edward's University!) Aim was taken at Roman Catholic schools not under the "thumb" of the Diocese. (Full disclosure: I served at the time on the Board of Directors of one such school, St. Gabriel Catholic School.)

With a ferocity seen largely in the U.S. alone, aim was then taken at anyone who was not sufficiently "pro-life" (read "anti-abortion"). St. Louis King of France Catholic Church was the first public victim threatened to be "burned at the stake" by the members of Austin's monied, anti-abortion movement. In 2011, they pressured their new bishop to bar Temple Beth Shalom, which lost its temple in a fire, from celebrating its annual Feast of Yom Kippur at St. Louis on September 17, 2010. The news broke 36 hours before the scheduled worship service, which was held at St. Louis the previous two years. The Diocese reported, "In view of the fact that Rabbi Alan Freedman is a member of the board of Planned Parenthood, ...Father Covington [the pastor of St. Louis] has determined, in consultation with Bishop Vásquez, to withdraw the invitation."

The next shot came in the direction of Cristo Rey. Our parish photographer, Alberto García, a noted attorney and community activist, invited me to a meeting with his wife, Blanca Zamora García, and with community leaders Dr. Emilio Zamora, Dr. Ángela Valenzuela, and Cynthia Valadez, Sr. The group was laying plans to host U.S. Congressman Luis Gutiérrez, a nationally-renowned champion of comprehensive immigration reform. Where else would be more appropriate for a Hispanic, Roman Catholic U.S. Congressman to address the issue of comprehensive immigration reform, than at Cristo Rey, the parish that now out-served all other Roman Catholic communities for Spanish-speaking immigrants? I readily obliged.

Three days before the planned event, I received a call from the Vicar of the Diocese, Monsignor Michael Sis, who kindly asked that I disinvite Congressman Gutiérrez. I pressed to know the reason. Not forthcoming, he insisted, "Your bishop has asked you to disinvite the Congressman, and I am simply being obedient to your bishop." The

reason was obvious: This Hispanic, Roman Catholic U.S. Congressman, by far the greatest champion for immigrant rights at the national level, had voted in favor of his conscience on such issues as women's reproductive health – the health of our sisters, daughters and mothers! – rather than with the merciless, oppressive positions of his right-leaning, patriarchal (and some would suggest, misogynist) church. To cite the phrase of Tom Peters, I also experienced my own BFO that day, my own “Blinding Flash of the Obvious”: I was no longer able, in good conscience, to be obedient to Monsignor Sis' bishop. (Imagine the rich irony felt by the people of East Austin when Monsignor Sis' bishop was later named Chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration!)

“Everything happens for a reason,” though, right? I recall with fondness the liberty that I experienced once I felt that I no longer needed to sing “The Mickey Mouse Song.” In the seminary, Father Kenneth Himes, the Franciscan priest who taught us ethics, warned: “If you want to be part of the ‘Mickey Mouse Club,’ you have to sing the ‘Mickey Mouse Song.’ You can't be part of the ‘Mickey Mouse Club’ and sing the ‘Donald Duck Song.’” Now heading toward the exit, for instance, I knew that I no longer needed to spew Papa Ratzinger's pure non-sense of homosexuality as “intrinsically-disordered” at a double funeral that I celebrated at Cristo Rey during my last weeks there, of a lesbian young lady and her mother, who were both assassinated by the father of the young lady's lover. When he read the summary of my homily in the *Austin American-Statesman*, our dear friend, Alberto García, who intuited that I was heading toward the exit, asked, “You're out of here, aren't you?”

“Everything happens for a reason.” I left Cristo Rey on May 31, 2011. I completed my Master of Business Administration, and my Doctor of Philosophy in December 2011. In March 2012, various former parishioners of Cristo Rey rallied with me to form Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin's first inclusive Catholic community. In November 2012, I began eight years of service as an elected official in Austin. I have since published over 30 books. Needless to say, it has taken until now for me to present this updated history of Cristo Rey Catholic Church.

“Everything happens for a reason,” right? I regret that this rich history of Cristo Rey Catholic Church is not written by an “insider,” by someone whose biases might better hide the sins of her/his/their

church and its clergy. I also pray that, in the same way that Cristo Rey's history was far from complete in 2010, it might be equally far from complete today. That is, I pray that Father Larry Mattingly's prophecy concerning Cristo Rey might not be realized. One evening, while watching television with him in the rectory living room, he mused over the future of East Austin, imagining the eastward expansion of the downtown, which would nearly erase the Mexican-American community and its memory from East Austin, where new neighbors would be annoyed by the drumming and *matlachines* in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and where the immigrant community of Austin would no longer feel at home.

It is now 2022. By my count—and the count of those who celebrated the 50th anniversary of Cristo Rey in 2000—Cristo Rey is celebrating its 72nd anniversary. According to a new parish logo, though, it seems that the current leadership of Cristo Rey is celebrating its centennial, its 100th anniversary. Attempts at revisionist history are not new, particularly in this age of “alternate facts,” but how fascinating that parish leaders would celebrate the 1922 “gift” of a tent on an empty lot, in order to get Catholic “Mexicans” — the terms used of all persons of Hispanic descent at that time—out of the back pews of present-day St. Mary Cathedral! We must ask ourselves: Should we really celebrate the overt racism of 1920s Austin? Leonard Gonzales still remembers how his grandfather, Andrés Rangel, was “kicked out” of the present-day cathedral—or, more politely, was told that the pews there were reserved for other people. Is this really something to be celebrated?

In the Roman Catholic spirit of unquestioning obedience, I share this history on the occasion of the “centennial” of Cristo Rey Catholic Church—and I mourn with repentant tears those so ridiculous to believe that this is merely the parish's 72nd anniversary. More seriously, though, I mourn the many ways in which the Mexican and Mexican-American communities of Austin have been and continue to be marginalized in Texas' capital city, and I pray that we all might learn from the many lessons presented by the many tremendous contributors to this rich and thought-inspiring work.

Everything happens for a reason, and had Pope Francis been elected eight years earlier, rather than the archconservative “Rottweiler of God,” [as if God would be known for possessing a

Rottweiler, of all dogs!], Austin would not possess today a truly inclusive Catholic community, free from the strictures and structures of the Roman papacracy, able to be the loving, merciful, compassionate face of Christ in our world. We'd all still be at Cristo Rey, loving the Roman Church, praying for her conversion, and working for reform from within, rather than wishing her well from without, from places filled with the "fresh air" that Vatican II sought to bring into the Church.

The human person, it seems, is the only animal species that does not learn from its mistakes. Let us pray for that day when we might learn from our history, become better siblings to one another, and thus be found worthy inheritors of the reign promised to us by Christ the King of the Universe.

¡Viva Cristo Rey!

Preface

“Then you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”

Attributed to Yehoshua bar Yehosef (John 8:32)

“What is truth?”

Attributed to Pontius Pilatus (John 18:38)

“There is no truth. There is only perception.”

Gustave Flaubert

“You shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you mad.”

Aldous Huxley

A Bold Theological Statement

From fifteen miles away, one can see the image of the risen Christ towering above Mount Cubilete in the Central Mexican state of Guanajuato. The serene figure extends his hands in a gesture of welcome, as if to say, “Come to me, you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Indeed, many people daily travel to and find rest atop that tranquil mountain.

Look again: Perhaps it is not a gesture of welcome. Imagine the sixty-foot bronze figure lowering his hands. His left hand approaches a crown of gold, lifted up to him by a cherub. His right hand hesitates, flinching at the thought of taking up the crown of thorns offered him by a second cherub. Or, is it his left hand that hesitates? The



*The image of Christ the King
at Mount Cubilete in Guanajuato,
by Juan Carlos Fonseca Mata,
image courtesy of Wikicommons.*

two crowns comprise a bold theological statement.

During his life on earth, Yehoshua bar Yehosef (Jesus of Nazareth) knew the crown of thorns. The first recorded canonical gospel notes how he was ridiculed, even by his own family, for being “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21). Twelve short chapters later, his friends have abandoned and betrayed him, and he is left to die alone, mocked by many as the “King of the Jews” (Mark 15:2).

According to later writers, however, the story didn’t end there. In an age before news media and scientific rigor, an oral tradition arose of how Yehoshua was raised from the dead. By the early second century, the original conclusion of the story (Mark 16:8) was judged inadequate, and an alternative ending was penned (Mark 16:9-20). Now supposedly raised from the dead, Yehoshua spoke with Maryam Magdala (Mary Magdalene) and a host of alleged witnesses before “he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). Appropriate for a community now advancing his divinity, the story ends with his vindication, such that one can now imagine him crowned as king of heaven and earth. Hence, the crown of gold!

Some people find it refreshing and liberating to learn the sources of such stories. Others, admittedly, find such sources confusing, frustrating or even maddening to find that the “truths” they once believed may now be suspect. It all depends on one’s perspective.

The Perspectival Nature of History

Too often we are tempted to believe that the way things are now is the way that they have always been. We tend to believe that our way of seeing the world is the only way of seeing it. And we confuse what we believe as individuals with some notion of universal “truth.”

One guiding tenet of postmodern thought argues that history is perspectival. As it passes from generation to generation, history is told from the perspective of the one who shares it. Sadly, for much of human history, the stories handed down to us have been shaped to a great extent by those in power and/or those with the greatest ability to effectively communicate their stories. In this way, much of our history as a people does not take into account so many voices, including those of women, people of color, and those who enjoy less power, wealth and education. For examples of this, one need only

look at the androcentric (male-centered) world of the Bible and the many interpretive theologies that have since arisen: womanist and feminist theologies, Black liberation theology, Latin American liberation theology, and the social gospel movement, to name only a few.

We all experience life differently. We all interpret life from our own unique set of circumstances. We all possess our own unique “truth” or perspective of the world. The great joy and challenge of compiling the present work lay in listening to and synthesizing numerous perspectives from a wide variety of sources, including written histories by various authors and interviews with parishioners of Cristo Rey Catholic Church and community members of East Austin. The author of the present work does not pretend for a moment that the stories shared by the people in this work are “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” They are perceptions and perspectives of individuals, each speaking from his/her own life circumstances, each speaking from what s/he remembers.

The Feeble Nature of Human Memory

Because the Roman Catholic Church was formally established in Lower East Austin only 70 years ago, this book is principally an oral history. Many of the stories in this work are the fruit of feeble human memory. Our memories are shaped by what we remember—and what we have forgotten. Some memories are more vivid than others. Many are influenced by such factors as our own biases, the recency of the events, the emotions tied to the experiences, and how easily the memories can be retrieved at present.

Due to the weak nature of human memory, many stories are now lost from history. In compiling this work, for instance, no living memories were unearthed of the old Sacred Heart Chapel in East Austin, about which only a single written trace survives. As another example, the event program for the dedication of the newly-built Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 1959 speaks of how the Catechist Sisters of Saint John Bosco had “left an indelible mark in the hearts and memory of the parish.” Admittedly, that mark is less indelible today, as many people who lived in Lower East Austin at the time struggle to even remember who the Catechist Sisters of Saint John Bosco were. The same could be said of myriad priests, sisters and lay

people who came and went throughout the years. Sadly, many such stories may be lost forever. Fortunately, however, many stories survive and are gathered together in the present work. They give us some indication of what life might have been like for those who have gone before us.

Reconstructing the Past

The French deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida (1982) once drew his readers' attention to a coin whose image had been rubbed away with time. Once the image is worn off, he said, it is impossible for a person receiving the coin to know exactly what the figure on it was. One can only imagine what it might have been like. The attempt to reconstruct history is very much like trying to imagine the face of that worn coin, and the historian faces the task of imagining various possible "histories."

As an example of this, the four canonical gospels (viz., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) exist as reconstructions by distinct four communities of the person of Yehoshua bar Yehosef. Each gospel is based on the stories that circulated about him at the time and in the place where each story was penned. Sometimes the stories found in these differing accounts conflict with one another. As a sum, though, they give us some idea of what people at that time might have thought and believed about the man we now know as Yehoshua or "Jesus." In the same way that the canonical gospels attempt to reconstruct the world of first-century Palestine, this book endeavors to help the reader imagine how life in the Flats of Lower East Austin might have been for the people who found their spiritual home in the Roman Catholic Church at that time.

Because this work is based on personal stories and recalled events, it admittedly reads at times like the ramblings of an elder. The work progresses, sometimes with little apparent connection between numerous people and happenings. For this reason, rather than read the entire work from cover to cover, the reader might do well to ponder a few paragraphs or pages at a time, entering into a dialogue with the stories and pausing to reflect on the meaning of such stories for him/herself and his/her church, culture and/or generation. In the end, each person will walk away with his/her own perspective on the meaning of so many stories.

The Two Crowns

As human beings, we try to make sense of the world we inhabit. This often leads us to categorize people, things and events: “good” versus “bad,” “right” versus “wrong,” “us” versus “them.” Hence, the overarching memory we hold of some individuals often appears rather simplistic: that “she was a good nun,” for instance, or that “he was a mean priest!”

The theological statement that begins this work consists of such a dichotomy: The crown of thorns is “bad,” and the crown of gold is “good.” Like Yehoshua and/or the risen Christ, sometimes we find ourselves amid suffering and pain; at other times, we find ourselves enjoying moments of immense joy and pleasure. Such is the history of our community: The Mexican and Mexican-American community of Lower East Austin has worn both crowns.

Many stories speak of deep pain and suffering, fears and prejudices, racism, discrimination and segregation. They detail the mistreatment, the disappointment, and even the scandals of a community. Indeed, some very dark moments are brought to light in this work. At times, those speaking cannot wrap words around the anger and bitterness they feel. Healing is still needed. These recollections form part of who we are. They provide part of our story.

Many bright moments also punctuate this work: stories of good, beautiful, well-intentioned people coming together, building community, and attempting in their own small or not-so-small ways to contribute to something much larger than themselves.

In the end, the history of the Mexican and Mexican-American community in Lower East Austin might be likened to a roller coaster ride, with all its attendant “ups” and “downs.” Many of the stories contained in this work take place between the “peaks” and “valleys,” the highs and lows, the “crown of gold” and “crown of thorns” moments experienced by this community.

Fasten Your Seatbelt!

Our roller coaster begins long before the first Mexicans arrived in Central Texas. When they were finally allowed to settle in Austin, they lived a marginalized experience in shanties near the city dump. They were then displaced to a ravaged flood plain. They lived a

marginal, “crown of thorns” existence. They carried within themselves a certain hope, however, believing that the crown of gold would one day be theirs. After all, they followed in the footsteps of the patron of Mexico. He, too, knew misery and suffering, and now he wears a crown of gold. Yes, the crown of gold awaits. A rallying cry is heard: “*Viva Cristo Rey!*” [Long live Christ the King!].

To better understand these Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on the flood plain, the Flats of East Austin, let us step together back in time!

Chapter One

Five Flags Over Lower East Austin: The Context for the Birth and Growth of the Mexican Population in Central Texas

“Waterloo [present-day Austin] was wilderness then,
the haunt mostly of the Indian and the buffalo.”
Mary Starr Barkley (writing of Austin in 1838)

“It is the most beautiful and at the same time
the most sublime scene I ever saw.
I know you will be delighted with it.”
W. Jefferson Jones (1839)

“There has sprung up, like the work of magic,
a beautiful city, whose glory is destined, in a few years,
to overshadow the ancient magnificence of Mexico.”
Attributed to President Mirabeau Lamar (1839)

“We all fell in love with Austin at first sight.”
Arnold García, Jr. (2004)

Five Flags Over Austin

In the past, visitors to Cristo Rey Catholic Church in Lower East Austin have remarked that visiting the parish might be likened to being in Mexico. In 2010, only one of nine Sunday Masses was celebrated in English. At that time, a spirited mariachi provided music for five of these liturgies, and other Masses featured such Latin American sounds as *rítmica* and *tropical*. Because six of every seven adults in the parish were born in Mexico, parish celebrations also tended to honor many of the customs and traditions of our neighbors to the south.

Indeed, if a person standing in Lower East Austin stepped back in time merely 180 years, s/he would literally find him/herself in Mexico. We recall the context of this history: Several nations once ruled over the territory presently occupied by the state of Texas. Six seals on the façade of the Texas State Capitol and six mosaics on the floor of the Capitol's rotunda capture the governments of the "six flags" that have flown over Texas. Five of them (viz., all but France) claimed sovereignty over the territory which is present-day Lower East Austin.

Before the First Flag: The Indigenous People of Central Texas

Put on your imagination cap, and visualize for a moment what Central Texas may have looked like 500 years ago before any government formally staked a claim to the land in which present-day East Austinites live. Imagine how the land that is now a cityscape was once the same hill country that currently surrounds Austin. Picture the brush-covered hills, the trees, the wildlife. Hear the birds and the rushing river.

Innumerable unnamed people passed over this land, long before the first permanent settlers arrived in Travis County in 1832. They were members of various indigenous tribes: the Comanche, Karankawa, Lipan Apaches, and Tonkawas, to note only a few. Public exhibits at McKinney Falls State Park and the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum attempt to piece together the story of these people.

Because early explorers mistakenly believed that they had arrived in India by an eastern route, these indigenous people became popularly known as "Indians," a title employed by various writers throughout the years and used here only with extreme caution and no intended disrespect. Groupings and tribes of such indigenous people filled the entire continent, often living a more nomadic than settled existence.

The First Flag: The Kingdom of Spain

The Crown of Spain became the first world government to claim present-day Texas as its territory. In 1517, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba came ashore present-day Mexico at Cape Catoche in the Yucatán Peninsula. The indigenous peoples quickly repelled him,

however, and forced his retreat to present-day Cuba, where he died three days later of the more than ten wounds he had suffered.

In 1518, a second expedition, led by Juan de Grijalva, sailed from Cuba along the Mexican coast and touched land only briefly in Tabasco. Though Hernández de Córdoba had arrived in the Yucatán Peninsula the previous year, Carroll (1983) refers to de Grijalva's landing as "unprecedented in history: a sudden, direct, unexpected contact of two totally alien civilizations."

The 33-year-old Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro led the third Spanish expedition, planting the Crown's flag, directing the conquest of the Aztecs, and establishing a permanent settlement in the New World. Cortés and his soldiers came ashore in present-day Veracruz on Good Friday, April 22, 1519, the day marking the supposed anniversary of the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Little did the indigenous people know that they would soon mourn the death of much of their great cultural heritage. Through syncretism, the cultures, races and religions of the indigenous people and their Spanish colonizers would blend. Racially, this would result in a new, mixed (or *mestizo*) race and a new culture which, in the northern expanse of New Spain, became known as *Tejano*.

The Syncretism of Roman Catholicism with Indigenous Beliefs

Roman Catholic missionaries employed ingenious tactics of evangelization, often seeking to syncretize European Catholicism with indigenous beliefs. The shaman, the practitioner of magic among the indigenous people, was now replaced by another "shaman," the Roman Catholic priest, who, in the view of the indigenous people, spoke one strange language (Spanish) during ordinary affairs, and another strange language (Latin) during religious rituals.

Perhaps the greatest story of syncretism occurred in the modern-day conception of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1648, fray Luis Laso de la Vega, the vicar of a chapel at Tepeyac (in present-day Mexico City), wrote an account about a 1531 appearance of the Aztec goddess, Tonantzin ("our sacred mother"), to an indigenous man named Cuautlatuazín ("he who speaks like an eagle"). Interestingly, a painting of this goddess on cactus fiber by Marcos Cipac de Aquino was christened by the missioners as "Our Lady of Guadalupe," based on an image of Mary the Mother of God in Guadalupe, Spain.

Likewise, the peasant protagonist to whom she purportedly appeared, if indeed he existed, was christened “Juan Diego.” He is now a saint of the Roman Catholic Church. If Cuautlatuazín (or Juan Diego) ever encountered the bishop of New Spain, which is doubtful in light of the fact that fray Juan de Zumárraga fails to mention Our Lady of Guadalupe even once in his extensive writings, Cuautlatuazín was likely not understood by the bishop and his people. Regardless, the indigenous people of New Spain suddenly had both a deity with whom they could identify (viz., Tonantzin or Our Lady of Guadalupe, depending on one’s perspective), and a model of piety, humility and submissiveness whom they could aspire to imitate (viz., St. Juan Diego Cuautlatuazín). Nearly 500 years later, the image of Tonantzin endures, and few would contest García González’s (2002) claim that “for the Mexican people, Christ the King and Holy Mary of Guadalupe are the pillars of their religiosity and their cultural identity.”

The Flag That Did Not Reach Austin: The Kingdom of France

While the ink was still drying on the story of Tonantzin, another Roman Catholic world power, the Kingdom of France, briefly claimed sovereignty of the territory of present-day Texas. In 1685, René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, landed at Matagorda Bay on the gulf coast of Texas. His fleet established a presence at Fort Saint Louis. Within five years, however, La Salle would be murdered, and the colony would succumb to an attack by an unspecified tribe. Regardless of whether France’s momentary claim reached as far as present-day Austin, which is doubtful, New Spain again enjoyed unrivaled claim to sovereignty over the land that would one day be Central Texas.

Life in the Northern Expanse of New Spain

During the ensuing period of continued Spanish sovereignty, explorers led the northward expansion of their empire. They eventually arrived in present-day Central Texas, where a Spanish cartographer would mistakenly transpose the names of two rivers on a map. As a result of this error, the colored river [*colorado*, in Spanish] became known as *el río brazos* in present-day Waco, and the river with many creeks or branches [*brazos*, in Spanish] would become *el río colorado* in present-day Austin.

Upon arriving in the land that is now present-day Texas, the Franciscan friars of New Spain established a network of Roman Catholic missions. In 1716, in response to the threat of the French settlement in present-day Louisiana, they constructed their first mission in East Texas. Two years later, they established the territory's first civilian settlement in what we know today as San Antonio. In 1730, these missionaries arrived in Travis County, founding the first chapel in Central Texas on a hill just east of what is known today as Barton Spring. A year later, however, they abandoned the post, withdrawing to the missions of San Antonio, and no record of activity by a Catholic community in Central Texas would follow for 115 years.

According to a 1998 film produced by the Western National Parks Association, the Spanish missionaries "were more than holy men. They were unique agents of expanding the borders of New Spain," eventually overseeing the evolution of *indios bárbaros* [barbaric Indians] into *gente de razón*, people of reason and good subjects of the Spanish Crown. "An unintended consequence of preaching the gospel in a foreign land," the film concludes, "was the creation of a new people." Such a transition, of course, was inherently traumatic for the indigenous people, for it meant the erasure of their culture, language, religion, and even previous names.

While working to "civilize" the indigenous populations of Central Texas, the Spanish also incited indigenous tribes to fight against and eradicate one another. Weber (1992), for instance, notes how a 1749 treaty between the Spanish and the Lipan Apache in Central Texas angered such tribes as the Comanche, who, according to Weddle (1995) later helped the Spanish to defeat the Lipan Apache and the Karankawa tribes.

The Second Definite Flag: The Republic of Mexico

After nearly three centuries of Spanish rule, the people of New Spain clamored for independence. One agitator, Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Roman Catholic priest in Dolores, Guanajuato, set the revolution in motion. Aware that the Spanish had discovered the revolutionaries' plot to separate from New Spain, Father Hidalgo y Costilla prematurely declared independence from Spain on the morning of September 16, 1810. With the conclusion in 1821 of the ensuing Mexican War of Independence, the territory of present-day

Texas became part of the northern state of Coahuila y Tejas, in the newly-formed Republic of Mexico.

In 1821, as the war was beginning to conclude, Stephen F. Austin brought the first three hundred families of permanent settlers from the United States of America to the northern Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas. After agreeing to abide by the conditions outlined by the Republic of Mexico, including the agreement that they would bring no slaves with them into Mexican territory, these pioneers set out for present-day San Antonio. En route, they received the news that Mexico had achieved its independence from Spain.

The Third Flag Over Austin: The Republic of Texas

In 1822, one year after the conclusion of the Mexican War for Independence, the Anglo Americans and European settlers in the northern expanse of the Republic of Mexico declared their own independence. Fourteen years later, on March 2, 1836, they achieved their independence from Mexico, thus establishing their own nation, the Republic of Texas, on April 21, 1836.

Confrontations with the First Settlers

It was during this war for independence that the first permanent settlers came to present-day Austin. In 1832, Reuben and Sallie Hornsby established the first settlement in present-day Travis County. With their six sons, they ventured into the territory from Wilbarger's Bend in Bastrop County. According to Barkley (1963), the settlement of the Hornsby family, at Hornsby Bend, was comprised of a fort with various cabins. It eventually became a stopping place for early settlers traveling from Mina (present-day Bastrop) to Waterloo, the small settlement that later became present-day Austin.

Although the Kingdom of Spain claimed the land of Central Texas 300 years earlier, the territory was still primarily occupied by various indigenous peoples. The encounter of the newly-arriving settlers with the indigenous people was rife with conflict and violence. The first two settlers to be buried at Hornsby Bend, says Barkley, were soldiers who were "scalped by the Indians while hoeing in their corn fields."

By the end of 1836, at least seven forts had been built in Central Texas. Two miles to the west of Hornsby Bend lay Fort Coleman (near

the present-day intersection of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Webberville Road in Austin). Barkley says that at the time, some sixty rangers patrolled the land between Hornsby Bend and Fort Coleman and “skirmished often with the Indians.” Within two years, a settlement sprang up just east of Fort Coleman and was designated “Johns’ Town” for the many men by that name who lived there. Reuben Hornsby frequently passed Johns’ Town during his buffalo hunting expeditions to the village of Waterloo (present-day Austin).

Barkley shares, “Waterloo was wilderness then, the haunt mostly of the Indian and the buffalo...The hunters and land speculators who hurried to it played hide-and-seek with the Indians and the buffalo.” An 1839 report by the commissioners named to select a permanent capital for the Republic of Texas similarly noted that present-day Austin was the home of “the Comanche and the Bisson [bison, or buffalo].” Noting that present-day Bastrop was “often in the path of the pillaging Comanches,” Barkley concludes that “until Texas was annexed to the United States, the problem of Indians was the worry of the Republic.” She notes the presence of other tribes as well. “The Tonkawas and Lipan Apaches also roamed the area,” she says, and in 1839, the Comanches were feuding with both tribes along the banks of the Colorado River. Often, the Cherokees passed this way, too, until they were later expelled beyond the Red River.

In 1839, an indigenous band captured and killed Coleman and his wife and children during a raid. At the time of Barkley’s (1963) writing, a monument at the site in East Austin proclaimed the fort to be “an extreme frontier outpost occupied by Texas Rangers, to protect Anglo-American civilization from savage Indians in this vicinity.” As another instance of such savagery, Barkley cites the 1841 death of James W. Smith, the first Travis County judge, who ventured west of Shoal Creek (near present-day Lamar Boulevard), thus breaking an unwritten agreement between settlers and the indigenous residents of the time. Searchers found his body scalped and pierced by arrows. The colony of Waterloo (present-day Austin) came to birth within the context of this clash between Anglo settlers and the indigenous people. In fairness to the indigenous tribes, however, who found their land now invaded by settlers, not all indigenous people could be judged to be savage or of ill intent. Barkley, for instance, tells stories of the chiefs of the Lipans and Tonkawas chatting with the settlers at their homes or stores just East of Austin.

The Beauty of Central Texas

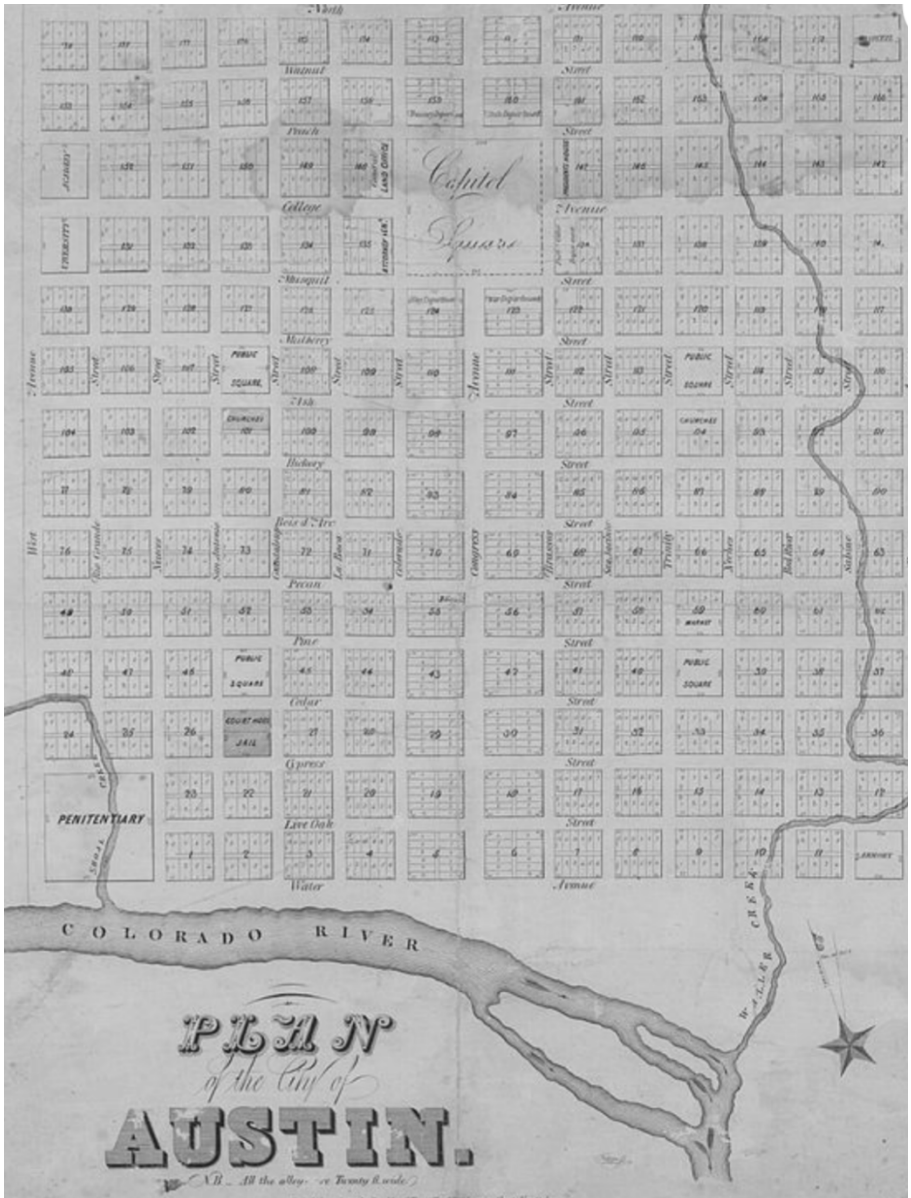
Those who came to settle in Central Texas soon began to record the history and beauty of their surroundings. In 1839, W. Jefferson Jones wrote from his fort at Wilbarger's Prairie:

I have just returned from Waterloo, the contemplated new seat of government....It is the most beautiful and at the same time the most sublime scene I ever saw. I know you will be delighted with it, and I frequently wished that you were present to enjoy the scenery as I saw it in all the majesty of nature and the verdure of spring. The atmosphere was charged with the most delightful perfume and every shrub and every hill and every flower seemed to extend a welcome to the weary traveler. I never expected to realize your eloquent description of Texas till I saw the lands of the upper Colorado.

Waterloo Becomes the Capital City of Austin

In January 1839, the Texas Senate agreed that the new capital of the republic would be named for Stephen F. Austin, the first Anglo-American to bring settlers into present-day Texas just eighteen years before. The Senate dispatched various commissioners into the wilderness to find an appropriate site for the new capital. Recalling an earlier buffalo hunting expedition to Waterloo, President Mirabeau Lamar asked them to visit the hamlet on the north bank of the Colorado River, which at that time was occupied by just four families. When they arrived, the commissioners envisioned a day when this land would be a crossroads, "standing on the juncture of the routes of Santa Fe and the Sea Coast, of Red River and Matamoros." The commissioners sent word of their findings back to the Republic's government, which, in turn, designated that the new capital city, Austin, would lie on the north shore of the Colorado River, at Waterloo. Present-day Shoal Creek (to the west) and Waller Creek (to the east) were the boundaries of the new capital city.

With the site of the capital now having been decided, President Lamar sent his friend, Edwin Waller, to plan the new city and construct the necessary government buildings. Waller's surveyors created a map (pictured below) of the 640-acre site (the present-day downtown district of Austin).



Austin street map, 1839, by L.J. Pille, public domain, courtesy of Wikicommons.

Like Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States of America which lay to the east, the capital city of the Republic of Texas was purposefully planned and divided into city blocks and lots. Water Avenue (present-day César Chávez Street) lay on the northern bank of the Colorado River, and the majority of east-west streets north of it were named for various trees of Central Texas. Present-day Second through Eleventh Streets were named Live Oak, Cypress, Cedar, Pine, Pecan, Bois d'Arc, Hickory, Ash, Mulberry and Mesquite. To the north of College Avenue (present-day Twelfth Street) were Peach, Walnut, North Avenue, Cherry, Linden, Chestnut, Magnolia, Elm, Palmetto, Orange, Maple, Willow, Sycamore, Laurel, Locust and Plum Streets (present-day Thirteenth through Twenty-Eighth Streets). A number of north-south streets were named for Central Texas Rivers, in order from south to north as they flow toward the Gulf of Mexico. Río Grande, Nueces, San Antonio, Guadalupe, La Vaca and Colorado Streets lay west of Congress Avenue. To the east were Brazos, San Jacinto, Trinity, Neches, Red River and Sabine. The streets east of East Avenue (present-day IH35) would also be later named for rivers: Medina, San Saba, Comal, Navidad and Lampasas. In August 1839, the lots of the present-day downtown district were auctioned off from beneath a tree in present-day Republic Square.

Waller set up camp with his workmen on the banks of present-day Waller Creek. Humphrey (1997) writes, "Waller resolved to have the new capital ready by the time Congress convened in November, but his motley crew of 200 workmen toiled under trying conditions—oppressive summer heat, scarce supplies, a scanty diet of dried beef, and the constant threat of Indians." Nevertheless, by November, they had constructed the necessary capitol, president's house, arsenal, hospital, penitentiary, schools and churches of a new capital city. They constructed the white-washed capitol building, which resembled a log cabin on piers, on the northwest corner of Hickory [present-day Eighth] Street and Congress Avenue. Two blocks to the east they erected the President's home, the "White House" (on the site of the present-day St. David's Episcopal Church). Barkley notes that the capitol building was surrounded by a stockade of logs and a large ditch, to protect it "from Indian attacks." Lining Congress Avenue, various temporary log structures were meant to house such government offices as the State Department and the War Department.

On October 17, 1839, the newly-fashioned city welcomed President Lamar and his cabinet. Barkley shares that when the president sat down to dinner for the first time in the capital city, he raised his glass in a toast, saying, “There has sprung up, like the work of magic, a beautiful city, whose glory is destined, in a few years, to overshadow the ancient magnificence of Mexico.”

In 1840, less than year later, the French sent a diplomatic delegation to represent their country in the new republic. The oldest surviving structure in the city today is the embassy (or “legation”) built at that time by the French in Upper East Austin, above the flood plain which reached to present-day Sixth Street. In 1840, Austin’s population numbered 806 people, according to official records. Of the 75 families listed in the census by the local Presbyterian minister, only 10 families were Catholic.

The Fight Over Austin Continues

Despite the Texans’ declaration of independence from Mexico and their establishment of the Republic of Texas in 1836, the Republic of Mexico still claimed sovereignty over the territory of present-day Central Texas. In 1839, the Mexican government sent General Juan Flores and his troops to advance on Austin. A unit of Texas Rangers rode out to defeat them. Three years later, on March 5, 1842, the Mexican army captured the city of San Antonio, and Humphrey notes that “[the] next day, nearly all the families left [Austin].”

As the Republic’s Fifth Congress was adjourning in 1842, General Antonio Canales of Mexico threatened to advance on the nearly-abandoned capital city. In December 1842, General Adrián Woll of Mexico threatened to do likewise with his troops. The Republic’s Sixth Congress thus voted to convene in Houston. In response, the population of Austin plummeted below 200 people. According to the story that she heard, Barkley (1963) wrote that with the government now gone, weeds grew in the streets, houses fell into decay, the Colorado River rose 36 feet, and the White House became a home for bats. Humphrey (1997) adds that during this time “Indian raids [within the town] grew more frequent and more vicious.”

The Catholic Church's First Purchase of Land in Austin

In 1840, only two Christian congregations met in Austin: a Methodist church and a Presbyterian church. An 1840 census notes that Austin contained seventeen Methodists, twelve Presbyterians, eleven Episcopalians, ten Lutherans, ten Baptists and ten Catholics. A French priest, Father Jean Marie Odin, visited Austin on November 29, 1840 to serve as chaplain to the Senate of the Republic. Odin, who would later be named the first bishop of Texas (1847-1861) and the second archbishop of New Orleans (1861-1870), noted that only two other priests served with him in the Republic of Texas at that time. For \$366, he purchased the six lots on the south of Cedar (present-day Fourth) Street, from Colorado to La Vaca Streets. Then he began to raise money to build a church and convent there. Father Odin did not accomplish his project during his short stay in Austin. Nevertheless, during the next decade, a handful of priests ministered to the small Catholic community of the capital city.

The Fourth Flag Over Austin: The United States of America

Although Texas sought annexation to the United States, several presidents, including Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, proceeded with caution. When the British became interested in the affairs of Texas, though, President John Tyler, through then Secretary of State John Calhoun, quickly acted. In 1844, a treaty to absorb Texas was sent to Congress, where it was defeated. However, on February 19, 1846, under the administration of President James Polk, the United States of America annexed Texas, making it the nation's 28th state. Austin, the capital city of the Republic of Texas, became the capital of the new state, and activity returned to the city.

During the previous year, 1845, the first written record noted a Roman Catholic community in Austin. On May 27, 1851, this (presumably-Irish) Catholic community petitioned Bishop Odin to assign an Irish priest to serve the spiritual needs of their community.

In 1852, the same year in which the Colorado River rose 35 feet, the foundation was laid for a new capitol building, just in front of the present-day capitol. That year, Austin's first resident priest, Father Michael Sheehan, constructed St. Patrick Catholic Church, for the first Roman Catholic congregation in Central Texas. At that time, the

church was located on the northeast corner of Brazos and Ash (present-day Ninth) Streets.

The Fifth Flag Over Austin: The Confederate States of America

After South Carolina's secession from the United States in December 1860, 300 of the 800 residents of Austin at that time took to the streets and demanded that Texas follow suit. Twenty-five years to the day after Texas first proclaimed its independence from Mexico, the state succeeded from the Union. Austinites thus became part of the Confederate States of America. Under the leadership of former U.S. Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, they rallied to support their troops. But the Civil War ended after the defeat of Confederate General Robert E. Lee on April 9, 1865. U.S. General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston to proclaim the freedom of slaves on June 17. In spite of this, Governor Pendleton Murrah encouraged Texans to continue the fight. As U.S. troops prepared to enter Austin on July 25, 1865, Governor Murrah fled for his safety to Mexico, where he died of tuberculosis ten days later. In 1865, the U.S. flag again flew over Austin, where it remains today.

From Slavery to Segregation

Now freed from slavery, many African-Americans began to migrate to Austin in search of employment and opportunity. By 1870, according to Humphrey (1997), nearly 40% of Austin's population was African-American. The majority of African Americans lived in various residential communities on the fringes of Austin: to the west in Clarksville, to the northwest in Wheatville, and to the east in Masontown.

Despite the community's marginal existence, the city of Austin enjoyed representation by four African-American city council members until 1885, when the cloud of segregation descended on Austin in the form of the "Anti-Colored Movement," thus ending minority representation in the city for 86 years (until 1971). Humphrey notes that a 1906 city ordinance later created separate compartments for African Americans and Caucasians on street cars; the last few seats of each car were turned backward and designated "For Colored." Residential segregation also occurred, with 80% of African Americans coming to live in Upper East Austin, just north of

the Colorado River flood plain. City ordinances further barred African Americans from owning or renting property in many neighborhoods, and, in the words of Humphrey, East Austin “developed its own business, social, and religious life and became a haven from white oppression.” Until Samuel Huston College opened in 1900, the only postsecondary option available to African American students was Tillotson College. In 1907, Anderson High School became the city’s only secondary school for African Americans.

Where Are the Mexicans?

Meanwhile, the Mexican and Mexican-American communities of Austin, lived an almost-invisible existence after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In fact, in her account of Austin history from 1839 to 1899, Barkley (1963) does not mention a single “Mexican” living in present-day Austin. One is led to presume that only the indigenous people roamed the land of present-day Travis County prior to the arrival of Anglo-American settlers in 1832. Although not mentioned by Barkley, persons of Mexican descent were residing in Austin by the beginning of the twentieth century. They lived a very marginal, “crown of thorns” existence, beside the city dump, on the banks of the flood-prone Colorado River. We now turn our attention to this marginalized community.

Chapter Two

A Marginal Existence: The *Mexicano* Community in Downtown Austin

“[Downtown Austin] is where everyone
[who was Mexican] lived.
We were all Hispanics.
There wasn’t a single White person there!”
Guadalupe (Briseño) Felán

“Mexican shanties near Dump.”
Caption of a photo in W. Hamilton’s 1913 work,
A Social Survey of Austin

“The most vulnerable area for floods...
where approximately 100 Mexicans
were forced to flee their homes.”
Eliot Tretter & Melissa Adams

“Mexicans are regarded as on a level with the negroes.”
1922 editorial in the *Austin American*

The *Mexicanos* of Central Texas

For decades, the term “Mexican” (or *mexicano*) was used as the racial designation for all persons of Mexican descent in Central Texas, regardless of the number of generations in which their families had resided in present-day Texas. In the days before such terms as “Hispanic,” “*Latino*,” “Mexican-American” or “*Chicano*” were employed, historical documents spoke merely of the “Mexican” population of Austin.

The First Mexicanos Arrive in Austin

Humphrey (1997) notes that Mexicans first migrated to Central Texas before the Civil War (1861-1865). At that time, the U.S./Mexico border was open, with no obstacles that kept people from crossing in both directions. José “Joe” Ávila recalls his mother’s stories of crossing the border at age nine with his grandmother in 1916. He says, “There was no one to stop them [from crossing], and they didn’t even have to pay.” Later travelers would pay a nickel to cross from Mexico into the United States. José still proudly displays the photo of his mother, Sofía (Pérez) Ávila, and grandmother, Agustina Limón, riding in the horse-drawn carriage in which they crossed into the United States



Agustina Limón (front right) and her daughter, Sofía (Pérez) Ávila (back left), crossing into the U.S. in 1916, with an unidentified friend and her daughters.

Unlike Barkley (1963), who failed to mention the presence of the Mexican community in Austin, Humphrey traced the presence of Mexicans in Austin back to 1854. In that year, he says, some twenty Mexican families were evicted from their camp on the outskirts of Austin for instilling “false notions of freedom” in African-American slaves. Kerr (2004) explains,

Early White citizens disliked and distrusted Hispanics. Fear of escaped or rebellious slaves found release as anger directed at the Mexican-Americans accused of encouraging them. In 1854, Austin mayor Rip Ford led a “Vigilance Committee” on a march to the encampment of Mexican-Americans to issue an ultimatum: The Mexicans must leave or be forcibly evicted. Most left.

Twenty years later, in 1875, some 300 Mexicans lived just west of Congress Avenue, where Shoal Creek meets the Colorado River. Due to the beauty of downtown Austin today, one might be tempted to think that the location of the Mexican community in the downtown district was ideal. In many ways, it was not. The land on which they

lived was the flood plain that Edwin Waller and his surveyors had imagined might one day serve as the site for a penitentiary. Due to the flooding of that area, the penitentiary was never built, and the land became, by default, a city dump.

The Shanties Beside the City Dump

Hamilton's 1913 work, *A Social Survey of Austin*, includes a photo of this dump, which was located at the mouth of Shoal Creek. The image contains piles of trash in the foreground, and various homes in the distance. Looking at the photo, one can see various members of the Mexican community rummaging through the trash. In the center of the photo's background is one of the shanties in which these people lived. In retrospect, of course, the placement of the Mexican population beside the city's trash was a strong statement regarding the community's marginal status within Central Texas society.

In his history, Hamilton offers a close-up of the homes occupied by the Mexican people. In one photo entitled, "Mexican shanties near Dump," it appears that the dwellings sat slightly higher than the land onto which the city's inhabitants threw their trash. Nothing in the photo speaks of stability, and even the shanty in the foreground seems to be in danger of falling into the dump.

In another photo of these Mexican shanties, Hamilton draws the reader's attention to the "For Sale" sign in front of a small row of primitive structures. He notes that a plot of land containing 8,832 square feet boasted seven "cottages" and "easy terms [of payment]." Connell (1925) presents a map of dwellings in the downtown district, labeling the majority of shanties as "Mexican huts." These huts are concentrated between Nueces and Lavaca Streets, in the two city blocks closest to the Colorado River (from West First to West Third Streets). On the map, the northeast corner of West First and Nueces is labeled "junk." To the west of Nueces lies the flood plain, to which city residents brought their trash.

On the Banks of the Rising Colorado River

The location of the Mexican district was unenviable for another reason: It lay on the banks of the Colorado River, which often flooded prior to the completion of the river's last dam in 1951. The worst flood in Austin history occurred in 1869, when the Colorado River rose over

40 feet. It is unknown how this flood affected the Mexican community at the mouth of the Shoal Creek.

One year later, in 1870, the river would rise 36 feet. Tretter and Adams (2011) note that, prior to the building of dams on the Colorado River, the district where Shoal Creek met the Colorado River was “the most vulnerable area for floods.” They suggest that the area of the city hardest hit by the flood of April 7, 1900, when the McDonald Dam broke upstream, “was the Shoal Creek district, the primary enclave for the city’s Mexican community at the time, where approximately 100 Mexicans were forced to flee their homes.”

Another flood in April 1915 damaged property not only along Shoal Creek, but also along Waller Creek. Tretter and Adams note that Waller Creek was “also an area of high Hispanic concentration.” Connell (1925) shares a map showing the intermingling of “Mexican huts” and “Negro huts” along the banks of Waller Creek, between Seventh and Thirteenth Streets. A 1915 photo possessed by the Austin History Center shows two Caucasian boys standing in front of flooded homes in the Waller Creek district. Seeing how the flood waters reached even the homes of the Anglo residents of the district, the viewer is left to imagine the damage wrought to the Mexican shanties lying closer to the river.

Memories of the *Mexicano* District in Downtown Austin

Various present-day community members still recall growing up in the Mexican shanties of the present-day downtown district. Guadalupe (Briseño) Felán, a native of Corpus Christi, remembers when her family moved from the town of Elgin to West Fifth Street in 1936. She was five years old. Calling to mind her memories of the Mexican enclave, she shares, “That’s where everyone [who was Mexican] lived. We were all Hispanics. There wasn’t a single White person there!” She remembers that all the homes in the district were rental properties, and that her father wanted to own his own home. Shortly thereafter, lots were sold in the Flats of Lower East Austin. In 1939, Guadalupe’s father was quick to purchase the property at 2513 East Fourth Street and move his family to the Flats.

Petra “Patsy” (Estrada) Gonzales remembers growing up in her family’s home at the corner of Congress Avenue and Second Street. She describes the neighborhood as being filled with “old, poor shacks.”

She says, “There were not too many houses there, and I don’t remember any that were white or yellow. They didn’t have paint.” She remembers the drugstore and the hardware store that were on the same block as the family’s home, and the *chilería* (chili-packing plant) two blocks away. Petra’s oldest sister, Mary, would later be wedded to Crescenciano Segovia, who purchased a machine to make tortillas and *masa*. At 10 years old, Petra began working at the Segovia family’s business on Second Street. Noting the popularity of the products made at the *tortillería*, Petra says, “You would think there was a funeral there, with all the people coming. They were always in line, all through the winter [to buy the *masa* used to make tamales].” Petra’s father, Cesario Estrada, and her future husband, Hermán Olvera, also worked there. She recalls that her father was responsible for cooking the corn and placing the *masa* into the machines. She also remembers her own role at the factory: “[My sister] used to let me count [the tortillas]. They would drop [from the machine], one after another, and you had to be quick [in picking them up], because [otherwise] they’d stick together! I’d count out twelve and put them into a plastic bag.”

Though her memories of the flood of 1936 are less clear today, Petra recalls: “The river would fill up so high, it would cover the whole park [between our home and the river]. It would come up to Second Street, and we would watch the water move and the snakes getting out of the water. I remember the snakes!”

Josefina “Fina” (Moreno) Zamarripa also lived in downtown Austin during the 1936 flood, though she lived with her grandparents in the Waller Creek district, near the intersection of Twelfth and Neches Streets. She remembers, “The creek had a flood. It was scary. It was very frightening. We had to get out of the house [and go] to the hill on Twelfth [Street].”

By the 1930s, the Mexican population of Austin had grown to over 5,000 people, nearly 10% of the city’s population. Humphrey (1997) estimates that at least half of these people worked on Travis County farms. Others were employed by the city’s booming food industry centered around “Chili Square” (present-day Republic Square Park), a park in downtown Austin surrounded by various *chilerías*.

Many Mexicans in downtown Austin largely made their living from the chili-packing industry. On the site of the present-day city

hall stood a *chilería*. Across from “Chili Square” was the AusTex Chili Company. Gerardo “Harry” Esquivel recalls working at the AusTex plant. “There was nothing but Spanish [spoken] there,” he says. Harry began his career at the *chilería*, unloading trucks filled with potatoes, carrots, beans and frozen meat. He later became a machine operator overseeing the canning of the *chili con carne*, beef stew, and spaghetti and meatballs that the company produced.

José “Joe” Ávila recalls that his mother, Sofía (Pérez) Ávila, worked at the AusTex Chili Company during the Great Depression. When asked if he, too, worked at the *chilería*, he responds, “Hell no. All the poor [Mexicans] worked there. They’d work from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., for \$25 a week.” Instead, José washed platters at the Lockhart Federal Bakery and Coffee Shop, on the corner of Congress Avenue and Tenth Street, thus paving the way for his own future career as the owner of Joe’s Bakery on East Seventh Street.

In a compilation of essays, Danny Camacho (2004) captures the sentiments of many whose ancestors once inhabited the Mexican district of downtown Austin. He writes:

My great, great grandparents, Eulogio and Pilar Luna, their seven children, and extended family came to Austin in 1872. They settled in an area called “Mexico,” near the mouth of Shoal Creek. The men were day laborers, and the women took in laundry....When I’m downtown on Congress, I can’t help but feel the presence of my ancestors. It is as if they had just turned the corner ahead of me.



José “Joe” Ávila enjoys at afternoon with his mother, Sofía (Pérez) Ávila, and his siblings, Fernando and Josefina, in front of the Old Fire Training Tower on the northern banks of the Colorado River. In the background (to the left) is a chilería, on the present-day site of City Hall.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church: The Spiritual Center of the Downtown Mexican District

After Father Michael Sheehan founded St. Patrick Catholic Church in 1852, the church became the spiritual center for the Roman Catholic community in the city. At the turn of the century, the Holy Cross Priests of St. Edward's University began serving the spiritual needs of the Mexican community and, in 1907, they founded Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church on the northwest corner of Fifth and (perhaps appropriately) Guadalupe Streets in downtown Austin. In contrast to the structures of a nascent capital city, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church was a simple wooden structure. The Holy Cross Priests at St. Edward's University served the needs of the community that gathered there. At that time, the Roman Catholic Mass was celebrated in Latin, but one can presume that the Holy Cross priests possessed enough command of the Spanish language to be able to minister to this community.

Petra "Patsy" (Estrada) Gonzales recalls walking with her family to the old Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in downtown Austin. She remembers, "We walked [to church] back then. Dad took us. [As girls,] we couldn't go out alone. No way. Especially at night. [We knew:] Don't even ask [for permission to go out alone at night]!"

Being Pressured Out of Downtown Austin

The City of Austin, which was once bordered by Shoal Creek to the west and Waller Creek to the east, continued to grow. Bridges were built across Waller Creek, allowing the city to expand eastward toward the Flats, the flood plain of Lower East Austin. At the top of the Flats, between East Fifth and Sixth Streets, lay the tracks of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, which began making rounds between Austin and Houston in 1871. An extensive freight yard, with warehouses and a boxcar settlement, grew up around these tracks, and, according to Kerr (2004), "much that was vital to Austin's early prosperity passed through this rail freight yard on the east side of town." Chief imports into Austin included oil, which was used by city residents for lighting and heat, and lumber, which included the longleaf pine from Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana, so popular in East Austin homes. Several oil warehouses, lumberyards and saloons sprang up in East Austin as a result.

It was at this time that the Mexican congregations of the downtown district were pressured to relocate in the direction of the freight yard on the outskirts of town. By 1926, the *Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana* (First Mexican Baptist Church), which had been organized in 1899, was pushed to East Avenue (present-day IH-35) and Third Street. According to the *Tejano Walking Trail Guide*, the congregation at that time was “fast becoming the center of the Mexican population.” José “Joe” Ávila possesses a photo (below) of his mother, Sofía (Pérez) Ávila, attending the Baptist Mission School founded by that congregation to serve the Mexican community of East Austin. Interestingly, Sofía’s inculturation into the English-speaking U.S. culture began at that school, and she would sign the photo with the new, anglicized version of both her first name and the last name of her stepfather, Pablo Limón: “Sophie Lemmon.”



“Sophie Lemmon” & her classmates at the Baptist school.

The *Iglesia Metodista Unida Emmanuel* (Emmanuel United Methodist Church), founded for the Mexican community in 1891, was also moved from Río Grande Street in downtown Austin to the corner of East Avenue (present-day IH-35) and Ninth Street. (The church would later be displaced again by the creation of IH-35 in the 1950’s and 1960s, and moved to its present-day site at 200 Brushy Street.)

By 1922, the Holy Cross Fathers at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church were presumably feeling the same pressure to move

their Catholic community out of the downtown district. At that time, Holy Cross Father Patrick J. O'Reilley, C.S.C. served as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. He was assisted by his parochial vicar, Holy Cross Father Angus McDonald, C.S.C. The two priests brought together a committee formally known as the "Catholic Home Mission Guild." The committee was tasked with the expressed purpose of locating a suitable site for a Catholic community in East Austin. The committee seems to have consisted of some eight people, only two of whom, interestingly, had "Mexican" names: J. N. Acevedo and Frank Prado.

After some weeks of searching, a suitable site was found just four blocks south of the boxcar settlement, on the 2200 block of East First Street (present-day East César Chávez Street). The property rested in the flood plain, within an emerging Mexican slum known as Buena Vista, which was bordered by Canadian Street (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) to the west, Pedernales to the east, Fifth Street to the north, and First Street (present-day César Chávez) to the south.

After purchasing this land for \$4,900, Father O'Reilley and Father McDonald tasked the Catholic Home Mission Guild with locating a house in the neighborhood near the purchased land, from which the Catholic community could be served. Such a facility could not be found at the time, such that the committee decided to purchase a large tent which was erected on the 2300 block of East First Street in the Fall of 1922.

During February and March of 1923, the celebration of Mass was moved to the Sacred Heart Chapel, a three-room shack in East Austin whose exact location is not known at present. For two months, the \$12 monthly rent was paid by the Knights of Columbus, presumably of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. For reasons that remain unknown so many years later, Masses and Sunday school were transferred back to the tent on the 2200 block of East First Street on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1923. One month later, in May of 1923, eighteen children received the sacrament of First Communion under that tent.

Father McDonald served the spiritual needs of the community that gathered in East Austin until January 1, 1925, when the Oblates of Mary Immaculate assumed responsibility for Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. There exists no record from the ensuing fifteen years

of any activity among the Catholic community in the Flats of Lower East Austin. The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, it seems, had their attention fixed on another goal: moving the Mexican community from the downtown district. The site that they had in mind, however, was in Upper East Austin, just above the flood plain known as the Flats.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Arrive in Austin

Beginning in 1925, the Spanish-born Father José Prieto, O.M.I. served as the first Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.) priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. His coming to the parish in 1925 was likely a drastic change from the Irish Holy Cross priests who preceded him. The parish's website suggests that Father Prieto arrived at Our Lady of Guadalupe with "the experience of sacred oratory that he had learned in Spain and France." He also served at the Proto-Cathedral of St. Augustine in the border town of Laredo, Texas. Unlike his predecessors, Father Prieto fluently spoke Spanish, his native language. Because of this, the Mexican community flocked to him. According to the parish's website, Father Prieto "began by preaching a two-week mission, and so great was the attendance and the consequent fruit of the mission that it immediately became necessary to seek a more ample site for the church and the school."

Father Prieto's ministry, however, was short-lived, and his successor, Father Francis Balzola, O.M.I., another native of Spain, would be left to carry forward his dream. Father Balzola purchased the land for the present-day church and school of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the 1200 block of East Ninth Street in East Austin. The parish's website claims that Father Balzola "tore down the church and school at Fifth and Guadalupe [Streets], and with the materials left over, constructed the new spacious church." Though not to be confused with the present-day church, this worship space constructed by Father Balzola was consecrated on September 5, 1926. No details are offered by the parish's website as to where the community worshipped during the building of this church.

Kerr (2004) advances the view that various congregations were pressured to relocate to East Austin. He says, "the relocation of several black churches to East Austin expedited the migration" of African Americans to Upper East Austin. As an additional incentive

for African-Americans to move from the downtown district, the city cut public services to all Black districts outside of East Austin, and African-Americans were banned from all city recreational facilities except Rosewood Park, near the intersection of East Twelfth Street and Pleasant Valley Road.

It can be imagined that many of the same factors were at play in the relocation of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church from the downtown district to Upper East Austin. It was at this time that the *mexicanos* of Upper East Austin received their own park, Parque Zaragoza, which Kerr notes was “the Community Center for all the Mexicans of Austin.” Kerr concludes, “These policies [of displacement] had the desired effect....The area around ‘Chili Square’ [in downtown Austin] lost its Mexican identity [and] East 11th Street developed into an unofficial dividing line between Hispanics to the south and Blacks to the north.”

In July, 1927, Father Balzola was called back to Spain, and three O.M.I. priests served Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church during the next five years. Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Father Gerard Mongeau, O.M.I., who would later serve as a bishop in the Philippines, was named pastor of the parish community. He was succeeded by Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Father Joseph Dwan, O.M.I., who was, in turn, succeeded by Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Father Francis Guenneguis, O.M.I. Little record survives of the impact of these men within the Mexican community of Upper East Austin from 1927 through 1932, and, based on their last names, one might imagine that they spoke less Spanish than their Spanish-speaking predecessors.

Treatment of the *Mexicanos* in Austin

During this time, the *Mexicano* population of Central Texas enjoyed an unenviable position in the dichotomous “Black/White” world of southern U.S. society. Because these “Mexicans” were neither Black nor White, Humphrey (1997) notes that the Mexican immigrants arriving in Austin during the 1920s and 1930s “transformed the town from a biracial [Black/White] to a tri-ethnic [Black/White/Mexican] community.” In a word, Mexicans did not “fit in.” In general, they were accepted neither by the Anglo nor by the African-American community. Additional tension arose because these “Mexicans” were

viewed as “outsiders.” Unlike African Americans, they were not born in the U.S., and they spoke a different language.

Mexicans were considered “alien” and inferior. A 1922 editorial in the *Austin American* states, “Mexicans are regarded as on a level with the negroes.” According to Tretter and Adams (2011), 1922 was the height of the nativist campaign perpetrated by Whites against “Mexicans,” such that some 22 “Mexicans” were lynched in the U.S. that year.

Being seasonal agricultural workers, many “Mexicans” were also transient. Humphrey (1997) advances that half of the “Mexicans” registered in Austin in 1929 had departed from the city within two years. The mayor of the city at that time complained that the “going and coming” of “Mexicans” had led to an increase in contagious disease in the city.

Like African Americans, Mexicans were restricted from buying and renting property in various neighborhoods. They could not use “White” restrooms and drinking fountains, and segregated schools, parks and public housing complexes would soon be created for them. The Mexicans were a persecuted and marginalized people, and with the city’s creation of its first master plan in 1929, a place would have to be created for them somewhere, anywhere outside the growing downtown district.

Chapter Three

Pushed to the Flood Plain: The Life of the Mexican Community in the Flats of Lower East Austin

“They moved to the Eastside,
another very flood-prone area.”

Eliot Tretter & Melissa Adams

“Us and the López’s: We were the only
Mexican-Americans on Holly.”

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro

“One of the privileges that non-Whites
were denied was ‘staying dry.’”

Eliot Tretter & Melissa Adams

“We sat on the hill and watched the flood.
[Later,] my uncles went through the house in a little boat.”

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro

Mexicanos in East Austin

A 1929 map of the city shows the ethnic clusters of Austin. According to the map, the African-American (or “Black”) community of Austin was concentrated in Clarksville, Wheatville and Upper East Austin. The Mexican community inhabited the “Mexican District” around Shoal Creek and the land in East Austin between East Eleventh Street and East First Street (present-day East César Chávez Street, which is marked by a trolley track on the map).

In 1929-1931, more scientific renderings of the location of the African-American (or “Negro”) and Mexican communities of Austin were published. According to one map, African-Americans comprised more than 30% of the population between East First and

East Eleventh Streets. The key on an accompanying map explains that Mexicans comprised 20-29% of the population in this same area. One in every five to ten persons in the downtown district (10-19%) was also Mexican. In contrast, less than one in every ten persons to the south of East First Street, in the Flats of Lower East Austin, was Mexican. At that time, according to Tretter and Adams (2011), the Flats were “the most flood-prone area” in the entire city of Austin.

Such maps were used to justify the city’s first, large-scale master plan, which encouraged the movement of the African-American and Mexican communities away from downtown Austin. Private racial covenants, which were common between 1915 and 1949, also excluded members of specified races from owning properties in many Austin neighborhoods. A deed, for instance, could make explicit that the property could be sold to a “Caucasian only.” Such private racial covenants did not exist in East Austin, however, such that the only barrier preventing Mexicans from moving to the Flats of Lower East Austin was the racial tension that existed between the Mexican and European immigrants. In the end, this European community would be displaced by the Mexican community.

The European Immigrants of Lower East Austin

Before the 1940s, the lower part of the Flats (south of present-day East César Chávez Street) was primarily inhabited by German, Swedish and Irish immigrants. Barkley (1963) notes that beginning in 1870, the Texas Central Immigration Company furnished Austin with laborers, mechanics and domestic servants from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The connection of Austin to other cities by railroad also encouraged immigration, and a State Immigration Bureau was opened in the Driskoll Hotel in downtown Austin. “Swedish immigrants were arriving by the wagon loads,” Barkley says, and many of these European immigrants moved to the Flats of Lower East Austin. The *Tejano Walking Trail Guide* states that “early residents were middle-class workers of European descent. These clerks, salesmen, dress makers, tradesmen and railroad workers and their families rode streetcars to work, shop, and socialize downtown. Early plats show large dairy farms, railroad right-of-way, and flood plain.” As an indicator of the existence of dairy farms, Lela E. (Cruz) Castro

remembers the cows that were pastured behind her grandparents' home on Holly Street, all the way down to the Colorado River.

It does not seem that the assimilation of working-class immigrants into the city was easily accomplished at that time. On June 6, 1886, for instance, the *Austin Statesman* recorded this testament to German cultural loyalty:

There is a German settlement in this city, wherein the settlers refuse to enroll their children or return their names to the census taker, for the reason that they do not want [their children] to learn the English language. Queer American citizens, these.

The German, Swedish and Irish immigrants thus formed their own culturally-rich enclaves in Lower East Austin, an area that was not yet populated by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

So Few Mexicans in the Flats

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro remembers that her family was one of only two Mexican families living south of East First Street during the 1930s. Reflecting on what would later become a primarily Mexican and Mexican-American community, Lela shares,

It's different now. I grew up [at 2221 Holly Street] with Anglos. The Peterson family lived three doors down [at 2207 Holly], and we were all very good neighbors. They had six children, and I didn't have any brothers or sisters, so I played with them. The Barber's lived farther down [at 2201 Holly]. Cattycorner from my grandparents were the Priest family. The Stockton's lived across the street [at 2214 Holly]. The Smith's lived next door [at 2212 Holly Street]. And the Richardson's were across the street, too [at 2300 Holly]. The Bailey's lived on Mildred Street [at 67 Mildred], and the Wallace's, too [at 68 Mildred]. Joe Gene Bailey worked for Ritter Gas [on Airport Boulevard] and was a good provider for [his] three boys. They were the only [family in the immediate neighborhood] with a little more money. [The neighborhood] was totally Anglo, except every now and then you could spot Hispanics.

Lela says that one indicator that the Bailey's children had "a little more money" was the fact that "they were the first [children on the block] to have bicycles, and they showed us movies in their garage with a projector."

Lela remembers only one other Mexican family in the neighborhood: the family of José María and Luisa (Treviño) López at 2211 Holly Street. The Cano family would be the next Mexican family to move to the neighborhood, but this would not happen until the late 1940s. During all of her childhood, Lela says, "Us and the Lopez's: We were the only Mexican-Americans on Holly!" Lela recalls that after the López's son, Norberto, purchased the Green and White Grocery at 1201 East Seventh Street in 1936, his family enjoyed more means. She shares the story: "During the depression, my mother got in line [to receive free food], and since the Lopez's were too proud to get in line, my mother got food for all of us [in both families]." With some pride, Lela recalls that Norberto's son, Munro, would later found *El Matamoros* (or "El Mat"), a restaurant famous for its puffy tacos and, as Richard Rendón says, "its doughnuts [which were as large as] wheelbarrow tires!" The restaurant sat on the site of the present-day Hilton Garden Inn Hotel, between East Fifth and Sixth Streets at IH-35.

Eulalio "Edward" Rendón, Sr. lives one block south and five blocks west of where Lela grew up. When he moved to his home at 1705 Haskell Street in 1962, he recalls, "There were many Americans here [at the time], on both sides of our house, and across the street. I was one of the first [Mexican-Americans] to move here. Then [the Anglos] left, and the *mexicanos* came." Eulalio recounts the story of how the Mexican community was moved from downtown Austin decades ago, to the land between Red River and *Calle Ancha* (present-day IH35), then to the Flats of Lower East Austin. Fifty years after witnessing this change in the neighborhood, he now sees another on the horizon: "Now, the *americanos* are coming again. They say that our land is very valuable. They make us pay high taxes, and they want to move us again."

Richard La Fuente emphasizes that very few Mexicans lived below East First Street. He says, "First Street was the dividing line: Down to the river was all White, [and] above First Street, it was all Spanish." Though his parents were Mexican and he grew up speaking Spanish,

Richard enjoyed a fair complexion. He shares the following story about the way in which Anglos and “Mexicans” literally hurled stones at one another.

If a “Mexican” came below First Street [from Buena Vista], he was going to get “rocked.” And when I went up to visit my sister at Santa Rita, [the Mexicans] would throw rocks [at me] and yell, “White boy!” So, if someone [below First Street] yelled, “Hey, there’s a Mexican!”, it was payback time! If we [from the Flats] went above First Street, we got “rocked,” and if [the “Mexicans” of Buena Vista] came south, they got “rocked.”

The Elite on East First Street

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro also remembers that her neighbors’ homes on Holly Street were very different from the residences a few blocks north, on East First Street. “All the ritzy people were on First Street,” she says. “They were all Anglos, all doctors, all of the upper-middle class.” During a tour of East Austin, Lela pointed out the brick home at 2214 East César Chávez Street. “Look at how nice it is,” she said, noting that a doctor lived in the home. “And the Bladges lived here [on East César Chávez]. The people with more money lived on these streets, including Willow [Street].” At a time before the affluence of West Lake, Lela recalls that “Enfield was the ritzy part of town. If you lived in Enfield, you were something. But if you lived on First Street, you had a little more money, too.”

The Floods of 1935 and 1936

Until the completion of the present system of dams on the Colorado River in 1951, the Colorado River often flooded. While many areas along the river felt the impact of such flooding, the Flats of Lower East Austin were always particularly hard hit. Those who lived in the Flats did so at their own risk.

Various attempts were made to control the flooding of the Colorado River. The McDonald Dam, for instance, was a large granite wall constructed in 1893 at the site of the present-day Tom Miller Dam. The dam broke during a 1900 flood, and all flatlands on the banks of the Colorado River were inundated, including the Flats of Lower East

Austin. A similar deluge in 1915 convinced city officials that they should attempt to rebuild the dam, but the project ran out of money before its completion, such that inhabitants along the river continued to feel the devastating effects of floods for decades.

After the floods of 1900 and 1915, the next deluge to inundate the Flats of Lower East Austin would arrive in 1935. According to a June 16, 1935 article in the *Austin Statesman*, “scores of persons living in the lowlands in East Austin were rendered homeless by the flood waters which drove them from their houses and which menaced property up to Third Street on the east side of the city.” An article in the following day’s *Austin American* suggests that as many as 3,000 residents of East Austin were homeless as a result of the flood, and that most of their possessions were destroyed. Based on the flooding of Barton Springs Road during the 1935 flood, one can imagine the destruction in East Austin.

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro was a young girl when the flood of 1935 inundated her family’s home at 2221 Holly Street. She recalls, “We all had to get out of the house, and we went up to the high ground on Mildred Street], and the water never got higher than that. We sat on the hill and watched the flood. [Later,] my uncles went through the house in a little boat. [Then,] after the water went down, we cleaned up our houses and stayed in them again.”

Fifteen months later, on September 28, 1936, another flood hit East Austin. According to an article in the *Austin American*, eight feet of water surrounded the homes at the intersection of Holly and Lynn Streets, while the homes at Riverview and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) Streets were covered with some seven feet of water. On the other side of East Avenue (present-day IH-35), Waller Creek had backed up, and water had flooded Palm Park.

Olga (López) Cázares, whose family lived at 2203 Garden Street, remembers the flood of 1936. She shares, “The river came all the way up, and there was four feet of water inside the house. It came up that high. That’s a lot of land to cover!” When her future husband, John Cázares, was repairing the home years later, they found the debris of the floods of 1935 and 1936 still lodged within the walls of the home.

Richard La Fuente, whose family lived on the north side of the street, at 2202 Garden Street, remembers being three years old during the flood of 1936. He remembers sitting on the sidewalk outside their

home in some six inches of water, and he notes, "Another flood [presumably of 1935] came up into the house!" This was an incredible feat, he says, noting that the house was a pier-and-beam structure.

The Mexicanos Arrive in the Flood-Prone Flats

It might be surmised that following the floods of 1935 and 1936, and in light of the increased economic means of the European immigrants who resided in the Flats, the German, Swedish and Irish immigrants may have been more than happy to begin selling their homes to other, less-suspecting immigrants, while they themselves moved to less flood-prone areas. When the Mexican population of Austin was thus moved from the downtown district, many of them were enticed by the available properties in the Flats of East Austin, near the Colorado River.

Tretter and Adams (2011) of The University of Texas at Austin have studied the way in which non-White, minority populations in Austin have been disproportionately exposed to the natural hazard of flooding. Noting that racist "Jim Crow" policies often affected such non-white populations as Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, they write, "One of the privileges that non-Whites were denied was 'staying dry.'" Citing the research of various scholars, they conclude, "from at least the early 1890s, non-Whites in the [southwestern United States] were increasingly excluded by law and custom from access to infrastructural improvements such as sewage, drainage, and paved roads, and were often forced to settle in areas that had greater exposure to environmental hazards such as flooding and disease." This, they suggest, was the case with the Mexican community of Austin in the 1930s and 1940s, since "when [these communities] moved from the western portion of downtown, the most vulnerable area for floods, they moved to the Eastside, another very flood-prone area."

The Mexican "Slums" of Buena Vista

On January 23, 1938, U.S. Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson delivered his famous "Tarnish on the Violet Crown" radio address, in which he spoke of his Christmas Day visit to the "Mexican" community that lived in Buena Vista, just two blocks north of the present-day site of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. According to a history

of the Santa Rita Housing Project published by Fred L. McGhee & Associates (2011), Congressman Johnson shared the following reflection:

Last Christmas, when all over the world people were celebrating the birth of the Christ child, I took a walk here in Austin—a short walk, just a few blocks from Congress Avenue. And there I found people living in such squalor that [this] Christmas Day was to them just one more day of filth and misery. Forty families on one lot, using one water faucet. Living in barren, one-room huts, they were deprived of the glory of sunshine in the daytime, and were so poor they could not even at night use the electricity that is to be generated by our great river. Here the men and women did not play at Santa Claus. Here the children were so much in need of the very essentials of life that they scarcely missed the added pleasures of our Christian celebration. I found one family that might be called typical. Living within one dreary room, where no single window let in the beneficent sunlight, and where not even the smallest vagrant breeze brought them relief in the hot summer—here they slept, here they cooked and ate, here they washed themselves in a leaky tin tub after carrying the water for 100 yards. Here they brought up their children, ill-nourished and amid sordid surroundings. And on this Christmas morning, there was no Santa Claus for the 10 children, all under 10 years old, who scrambled around the feet of a wretched mother bent over her washtub, while in this same room her husband, and the father of the brood, lay ill with an infectious disease.

Clearing the Mexican Slum: The Santa Rita Courts

The U.S. Housing Act of 1937 would call for the establishment of public housing. Congressman Johnson worked with Austin Mayor Tom Miller to divert federal monies to his district, and in 1939, the Santa Rita Courts were opened as the nation's first public housing project. A 1939 article in the *Austin Statesman* refers to the "Mexican project" as "the nation's No. 1 slum-clearance project." The article also brags that fifteen families had recently moved into "the new low-

cost housing units for which Austin has received nationwide praise.” The article speaks of the pride that residents took in their new homes:

Peep in the front doors, and you view humble efforts at decorations: bright paper flowers, little ornaments...and the inevitable colored print of the Madonna and Christ Child... On top of every spotless, white porcelain kitchen stove in Santa Rita is a pot of brown beans bubbling under a low flame. Whether it is a lean-to shack or a modern housing unit—this means it’s home to these Mexican families.

Only Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were allowed to live at the Santa Rita Courts, since similar, segregated projects were being built at Chalmers Courts (for Caucasians) and at Rosewood (for African-Americans). Monthly rent at the Santa Rita Courts ranged from \$10.20 to \$11.70 per month (compared with \$14.20 for the Caucasian residents at Chalmers Courts), and included hot and cold water, gas and electricity.

At that time, the Santa Rita Courts consisted only of the one-story cinderblock buildings on the northwest corner of East Second and Pedernales Streets. The land to the west of the projects, presently filled with the two-story apartments of the Santa Rita Courts, was a pasture for horses. When the mission church at Cristo Rey was later moved to the neighborhood in 1942, families would cross through the pasture during their walk to the church from their home on the 2600 block of East Third Street. Sixto Ramírez remembers the gate in the barbed-wire fence of this pasture, through which he passed on his way to serve as an altar boy at the old Cristo Rey Mission Church. There were no fenced-off yards in East Austin in those days, so a person could walk between the houses between East Fifth and East Third Streets. Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles similarly remembers that there were few houses between his family’s home on Santa Rita Street and the site that would later be occupied by the mission church. “It was very open,” he says, “and we could walk directly [from our home on Santa Rita] to the church.”

The Availability of Property in East Austin

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro doesn't recall how her grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Frank Cruz, moved to 2221 Holly Street. She says they bought their house for "a little bit of nothing." José and María Mireles, natives of San Diego de Alejandría in Jalisco, Mexico, also purchased their home in Buena Vista for a seemingly low price. Their son, Guadalupe "Lupe" Mireles, recounts the story of how his father secured a wood-frame house from a man who was eager to move the structure from the downtown district in 1943:

My dad was downtown, and he met a man who was moving houses. [The man] asked my dad if he wanted to buy a house. [My dad] said, "I don't have any money." So [the man asked], "Do you have a dollar in your pocket?" [My dad] said, "Yes." And [the man] said, "Let me have it. You just bought a house!" [My dad later] signed a contract to buy the house, and they moved it here [to 2313 Santa María Street]. After years of working in the north [in the fields of Wisconsin], he paid for the house.

Manuel Casas Villanueva was born the same year, in 1943, while his maternal grandfather, José Casas of Montemorelos of Nuevo León, was busy purchasing various lots just east of Buena Vista, in what would become known as the *Barrio de las Viudas*, a neighborhood nicknamed for the many women there who were widowed.

During that same year, 1943, Jesse Niño recalls moving to Santa Rita Street in Buena Vista. He recalls that the dirt roads of the surrounding neighborhood cut through large groves of mesquite trees. From his present home at 2712 East Third Street, he explains that in 1946 "there were no houses here, just land with trees." Jesse was earning \$15 per week, picking cotton in Taylor and Lubbock. He recalls his aunt encouraging him to purchase land from a Mr. Chernoski, who was selling multiple lots in East Austin. The price for the lot was \$700, payable with \$15 down and \$5 payments per month. He also recalls Ralph Lee, an African-American man who raised horses, pigs and chickens just north of his property.

The lots of East Third Street were quickly being sold, and many of the properties were purchased by Mexican and Mexican-American families who were moving to the city of Austin from such places as

Lockhart and Bastrop. Sarah “Sallie” (Martínez) Lozano, whose mother, Celestina “Sallie” (Espinoza) Martínez, was born in Bastrop, remembers the stories of her father: When Manuel Gómez Martínez and his wife, Celestina, moved to 2614 East Third Street, there were no paved roads or storm sewers in East Austin. And when it rained, Sarah says, “They’d get stuck in the mud!”

Louis Cuevas, whose grandparents moved to 2703 East Third Street from Lockhart in the early 1940s, shares, “They all knew each other in Lockhart and moved to the same subdivision [in Austin].” Like Sarah’s father, he remembers: “There were no gutters [back then], so when it rained hard, it would flood [the intersection of] Third and San Saba. We’d go [as kids] and jump in the dirty water!” He recalls that when trucks sprayed tar onto the streets twice each year, he and the neighborhood children would run outside. “We’d chase the truck,” he says, “and get our feet full of tar!” They also followed the DDT trucks, which fogged East Austin to control the mosquito population in the Flats. Interestingly, an “Inventory of Some Present and Future Needs for Austin and Its Territory,” printed in the *American-Statesman* (March 12, 1944), lists mosquito control, rat eradication and slum clearance as primary health and sanitation needs of the city at that time. One can easily imagine that the streets just north of the Santa Rita Courts were still considered part of the “Mexican slum” at that time.

Louis also remembers playing baseball on the present-day property of Francisco “Frank” Granado, a native of Lockhart who in 1950 tired of his daily commute and decided to move to Austin. Francisco later purchased the property at 2700 East Third Street, onto which he relocated a house that was being moved from the present-day site of Brackenridge Hospital.

Teresa (Cuevas) Estrada also remembers the excitement of neighborhood children when the circus yearly arrived in East Austin. For various years, the big top was raised on the barren lots just south of Brooke Elementary, just two blocks from the family’s home on East Third Street. She says, “We’d be looking from the window [of our home] early in the morning, and you’d see the elephants, horses and monkeys marching down First Street, [on their way] from the train station to the lots [where the big top was set up].” Her brother, Louis, adds, “My grandfather would take me around and show me all the animals.”

Memories of Life in Lower East Austin

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro recalls that there were no paved streets in the Flats, and that she and her family had to walk up to First Street to catch the nearest bus. The only business in the immediate neighborhood at the time was Ralph's Grocery, which was located on the site of the present-day laundromat. She says that her family was one of the few families on the block with indoor plumbing at the time, but that the family had to bathe outdoors. She also recalls the cast iron pot in which her mother did the family's laundry, over a wood fire. When pavement finally came to East Austin in 1946, she recalls each family had to pay for the section of pavement in front of its home. It is unclear whether all families were able to pay for their sections of the pavement and/or whether the city of Austin channeled monies toward this effort.

Lela recalls playing tag, hide-and-seek and "kick the can" at the "dump," an excavated hill on the site of the future Holly Street Power Plant. She also remembers:

We used to play soldiers on the dump. There was a trail all around the dump, and [the trail] went down to the Colorado River. We would climb on logs [floating in the river] and hold on, and they would take us down to the little rapids where the Longhorn Dam is now. [Lady Bird Lake] was a river back then.

Richard Rendón also remembers the gravel pit at the present-day site of Fiesta Gardens, near the Colorado River. The quarry was filled with sulfur water, and Richard says, "you could smell it two miles away!"

Olga (López) Cázares describes this neighborhood in Lower East Austin as "very safe. Kids would sleep outside in the lawn for fun. We kept our windows open. We knew everyone." Richard La Fuente adds, "You could hang out your clothes [to dry], [and] you didn't lock doors in those days."

Richard La Fuente remembers that due to their proximity to the river, "people [in the Flats] were called 'river rats.' [The neighborhood] was infested with rats. Further up, near Navasota, [the next neighborhood] was called 'flea town.' They were infested with fleas!" He says that his parents, Alfredo and Aidalaida "Doña Ida"

(Cadena) La Fuente, traded a horse and buggy for their home at 2202 Garden Street. Richard's wife, Elma (Durán) La Fuente, is quick to add of her father-in-law: "He was also a bootlegger!" Richard responds with an air of justification, "And he was also an altar boy!"

Residents living in Lower East Austin would walk up to the intersection of East First and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) Streets to catch the trolley downtown. Richard La Fuente, who was born in 1933, shares, "I remember riding the trolley to town with my mother until I was seven or eight years old." John Cázares, who was raised at 1302 East Seventh Street, can still trace the trolley route in his mind: from Congress Avenue to Waller Street, north toward East Seventh Street, then to Eleventh Street, right to St. Bernard, etc. John and his friends, who shined shoes for three to five cents, were not welcomed at the Red River stop. He shares, "The barbershops [there] had regular shoe shines, [and] they didn't want us on the sidewalks shining shoes. A policeman, Old Man Taylor, would chase us, but he couldn't catch us, we would jump on the trolley!"

Memories of Life in Buena Vista

Guadalupe Carmona García says that in the 1940s and 1950s the population of Buena Vista was entirely Mexican, apart from the family of Frank and Thelma Kunczik, who lived on the property occupied by the present-day Cristo Rey Parish Center at 2208 East Second Street. Guadalupe's family lived at 2210 East 2½ Street, and he still remembers the neighbors on both sides of the family home: the families of Alex Molina, Sr., Barnie and Helen Espinoza and the Navarro's to the east, and Eulalio "Lalo" Rivera, and Josefina "Mama Fina" to the west. He recalls that the neighborhood was "peaceful. You could leave your doors unlocked." He also notes, "We had a roof, food and clothes: We didn't know we were poor."

On Santa Rita Street, Guadalupe "Lupe" Mireles remembers growing up with electricity and plumbing, but no telephone. His family's home was set atop a pier-and-beam structure of cedar posts, but he recalls that the neighbors' home had no foundation: "It was a dirt floor until only a few years ago." Lupe also recalls having to pay some \$150 in 1946 to pave the half of the street in front of his property.

Manuela "Nellie" (Pérez) Téllez remembers that in the late 1930s there were no homes on the north side of the 2200 block of Santa Rosa

Street. For some years, the *Carpa Cubana* would bring its circus to that block. Manuela recalls the big top, clowns, tightrope walkers, animals, and especially the cotton candy. Once the land was sold and homes were built on the lots, the circus no longer came to Buena Vista.

In 1945, Richard Rendón was birthed by a local midwife, Doña Pimeña, at the home rented to his parents by local iceman Adrián Ávila, at East Fifth and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) Streets. Because the boxcar settlement was across the street, he jokes, “My belly button is buried beneath the railroad tracks.” He says that the only African-American resident of the neighborhood, Ms. Laura, lived across the street from his family. Richard shares, “We were dirt poor. We couldn’t even pay the rent. My father couldn’t speak English, and he was a laborer at Mansfield Dam. When I was a teenager, I didn’t know what a toothbrush or a dentist was—I didn’t have one!”

The old transit office on the southeast corner of East Fifth and Chicón Streets was the place in which train engines were literally turned around. The boxcar settlement, which housed those working on the railroad and in the freight yard, was on the same block. The Limón Family had purchased the southern side of the 2200 block of East Fifth Street, such that Leonides “Moe” Carmona García, Jr. jokes that “*Calle Cinco* used to be *pura limonada*” (Fifth Street used to be “pure lemonade,” a play on words based on the family’s Spanish last name). Manuela “Nellie” (Pérez) Téllez remembers that when soldiers passed by on the trains, they would throw pennies and candy to the children of the neighborhood, and the Limón children were often the lucky beneficiaries of such generosity. Just north, the cotton mill known as the “oil gin” was located at the intersection of East Seventh Street and Webberville Road.

The Unforgettable Stench of the Matanza

Many residents in East Austin remember the *matanza*, the slaughterhouse located on the property of the present-day offices of Capital Metro, on the northeast corner of East Fifth and Pleasant Valley Streets. The Austin Municipal Abattoir was opened in 1930 as a sanitary facility to which Austinites could take their animals to be slaughtered. At the time, it was the nation’s largest urban slaughterhouse.

Due to the abattoir's convenient location beside the railroad tracks, animals to be slaughtered could be brought into the city by train and corralled on the north side of East Fifth Street, between Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) and Pedernales Streets. Some residents recall how the cows and bulls that were corralled there sometimes escaped from the pen and roamed the streets.

At the abattoir, the animals were led up a three-story ramp where they were slaughtered. Antonio "Tony" Quiroz remembers the *matanza*: "We'd go by there, and sometimes we'd see them killing [the cows]. The cattle were pushed up a ramp, shocked with electric pokers." Louis Cuevas similarly remembers:

As young teenagers, we'd go over to see the cows go up the ramp. And next to the slaughterhouse was the livestock auction. On Wednesdays, we'd go there to listen to the auctioneer and to see the Anglo ranchers come in their pickups to buy horses and cattle and even herds of buffalo.

Manuel Casas Villanueva recalls that his neighbor, Ralph Lee, who grew up only a few houses to the east of Manuel's grandfather, was responsible for killing the animals at the *matanza*. "[Ralph] killed them with a *mazo en la cabeza* [a mallet blow to the head]," Manuel says. "But later [he started using] bullets. *Era más humano* [It was more humane]." Ralph himself jokes, "I'm a killer." He describes his slaughter of cows at the *matanza*, but also his brother's duties at the same:

I'd get 'em in the knockin' box, and I'd kill 'em with a *mazo*, a hammer. [Later, I'd come to use] an automatic rifle, with a shot in the back of the head. [For some,] I had to get that 30-30 [rifle], if their skull was real heavy. If they were pigs, my brother stuck 'em with a knife, and he'd sell the blood bait to fishers.

Though African-American, Ralph was accepted by his Mexican and Mexican-American neighbors in the *Barrio de las Viudas*. Manuel notes that Ralph learned Spanish at a young age, and that "he's like a brother. We love him dearly."

Neighbors of the *matanza* recall the stench that emanated from the business, even overwhelming the delicious smells of the foods

prepared by their mother, grandmothers and aunts. Helen (Mendoza) Morales also remembers the slaughterhouse. She says, "It stunk. It was nasty. We weren't allowed to go anywhere near it, and [when we walked by it] we would have to cross the street [to the other side because] it stunk so much." The sounds that came from the *matanza* were equally disturbing, and neighbors remember the moaning and groaning of cows. From his home on East Ninth Street, José "Joe" Ávila recalls the "screaming" of the cows. The stench and the screaming of animals in the neighborhood ended in 1969 when the *matanza* was closed by the City of Austin.

While the facility was in operation, though, the owners of the slaughterhouse threw away the tripe of the cows, and neighborhood residents took metal tubs to claim free *menudo* and cows' feet. Manuel Casas Villanueva recalls, "*Regalaban todo: tripas, menudo, fajitas* [They gave everything away: tripe, the stomach, *fajitas*]. *Llevaba botes grandes* [I used to take large containers], five-gallon buckets that we'd fill with *tripas, fajitas* and *cabezas* [the heads of the animals]." Knowing that *fajitas* are now a Tex-Mex delicacy, Michael Gerard Téllez remembers with a laugh: "One day [when I was a kid], Mom was driving, and we pulled up to a stop sign [in the city]. A man had a sign that said, 'Poor man's meat on sale.' I asked Mom, 'What's poor man's meat?' It was *fajitas!*"

Chapter Four

“Do You Realize What We’ve Been Through?” Early Treatment of the Mexican and Mexican-American Community in the Flats

“On our birth certificates, it said ‘White,’
but we didn’t feel White.”
Hermalinda Zamarripa

“One sign said ‘White,’ and the other [fountain]
didn’t have a sign – but we knew it was for us.”
José “Joe” Ávila

“I was whipped and hit with a ruler
for saying any word in Spanish.
You couldn’t even say ‘no’ with a Spanish accent!”
An East Austin resident

“Do you realize what we’ve been through?
We’ve been through some hard times, too.”
Gonzalo Barrientos

Paying the Price for Being “Brown”

Tretter and Adams (2011) suggest that Delaney’s (1988) biracial division of Austin into “Black” and “White” races prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not adequately address the presence of the Mexican and Mexican-American population in the city. Hermalinda Zamarripa explains, “Forms for school only had ‘Black’ and ‘White.’ We were confused [as to which box we should mark for ourselves]. [People] said, ‘put «White».” When asked if she ever felt “White,” Hermalinda is quick to respond, “Hell no!” Irene (Sánchez) Ramírez similarly relates, “On our birth certificates, it said ‘White,’ but we didn’t feel White.”

Tretter and Adams (2011) assert that many White Americans were comfortable with a hierarchy of social relations, in which some persons were viewed as “higher” or “better” than others. They write, “Mexicans were [thus] painted as inferior, tainted, and less human, due to both their history of racial ‘mixing’ and to their having lived under ‘backward’ Spanish and Mexican political systems [such that] by the end of the 19th century, ...Mexicans [were] more-or-less categorized as ‘non-White.’” In this way, according to Tretter and Adams, Mexicans inhabited a certain racial “purgatory”: the law clearly stated that they were not Black, yet they were denied the privileges of being White. As a result, Tretter and Adams (2011) say, Hispanics “often paid the price for being Brown.”

Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the racism and discrimination perpetrated against members of the Mexican and Mexican-American community were overt, and Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were not allowed in many public places. Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña recalls, “[If you were Mexican or Mexican-American,] you couldn’t eat in some cafes. You couldn’t even go in. You had to order food from another window.” Dorothy Portillo shares similar memories from family travels: “My father would get out of the car first [at a restaurant, and he would go in] to see if we could go inside and eat. Sometimes, [because he had to,] he just ordered the food to go.” For years, Gonzalo Barrientos understood such treatment to be part of life. He says, “I grew up as a farm worker, getting thrown out of restaurants because they didn’t serve Mexicans.”

When asked if he has ever experienced discrimination as a result of his race, Vidal Limón responds, “Oh yeah, a lot of discrimination, especially in West Texas. They had signs at restaurants that said, ‘No Mexican or dogs allowed.’ They didn’t want us there, so we didn’t go in.” He even recalls one sign in a West Texas restaurant that read, “No greasy Mexicans allowed.”

Manuela “Nellie” (Pérez) Téllez remembers once standing up to such mistreatment. She tells the story:

My brother, José, was a truck driver and took people to pick cotton. We would see signs on restaurants that said, “No Mexicans.” One day, we were giving a ride to this lady, a widow, and her two daughters, and we decided we were going to go in [to such a restaurant]. We were young and

not afraid—and we wanted hamburgers real bad. [When we walked in,] the man at the counter said, “Didn’t y’all read the signs, young ladies?” I said, “Just sell us some hamburgers. We might be Mexicans, but we’re U.S. citizens, and we’re not begging. We have money to pay for our food.” [On most days,] we would eat bologna and cheese under the truck because they wouldn’t give us hamburgers, but that day they did!

In South Texas, Richard Rendón remembers a sign on the highway outside Uvalde that warned, “No dogs and no Mexicans in town.” Closer to Austin, John Cázares recalls traveling to a church bazaar in the town of Red Rock, 29 miles southeast of Austin. A billboard there announced, “Mexicans and Blacks: Don’t let the sun go down on you.” Mexicans and Mexican Americans were also not welcomed at the gazebo in Palm Park, just on the other side of East Avenue (present-day IH-35), and some elders remember how the Whites at that park threw stones at Blacks and “Mexicans” who walked by.

Overt Segregation

In many places within Austin, African-Americans and Mexicans were not allowed to mingle with Caucasians. There were separate, segregated entrances to the city’s train depot and to many department stores and restaurants. Many public services like restrooms and drinking fountains, if indeed they existed for African-Americans and Mexicans, were distinguished from “Whites only” facilities. José “Joe” Ávila, for instance, tells the story of the two water fountains inside the Woolworth’s on the northwest corner of Sixth and Congress: “One sign said ‘White,’ and the other [fountain] didn’t have a sign—but we knew it was for us.”

A native of Lockhart, Father Albert Ruiz remembers how even movie theaters had separate sections for “Whites,” “Blacks” and “Browns.” Signs on the walls directed people to the appropriate section. Father Ruiz shares, “The Whites were downstairs. Brown and Black were upstairs, with a board between the two [Brown and Black] sections.” A 1965 graduate of Lockhart High School, Father Ruiz remembers that his senior class could not go on their senior trip to New Orleans. Desegregation had occurred in Texas, he says, but not in Louisiana, where “Blacks couldn’t stay at a hotel.”

José “Joe” Ávila also remembers the segregated sections for Blacks and “Mexicans” in the back of all city buses. At that time, the “Mexicans” did not dare to sit in the “Whites only” section. His wife, Paula “Pauline” (Robles) Ávila, explains, “We kept the place [that Whites] gave us. We didn’t fight back, like the Blacks. If they told us to go to the back [of the bus], we went.” Their daughter, Rose (Ávila) Maciel, further clarifies, “[Mexicans] are more timid. They let people run over them. They don’t want to be out of place.”

Reflecting on all the overt segregation faced by the Mexican community throughout the years, Gonzalo Barrientos concludes,

To be poor and oppressed in a third-world country is a horrible thing. To be poor and oppressed in the United States is a sad, depressing phenomenon. Supposedly, this is “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” [He laughs.] But not quite for everybody.

Discrimination at School

For children, the overt discrimination continued at school. Gonzalo Barrientos recalls when he went to school in the 1940s, Mexican children were referred to by their White peers as “pepper bellies,” “greasers” and “wetbacks.” If Mexican Americans attempted to get along with their Caucasian peers, they were called “gringo lovers” by their Mexican friends. Richard Rendón remembers that he and his friends were called “taco benders” and “bean-eaters.” Gonzalo’s grandfather wisely taught his grandchildren that what the children were saying at school was merely a reflection of their upbringing. Gonzalo says, “When I would come home crying and saying that the kids were picking on me, my grandfather would say, ‘*No los culpes a ellos, sino el corral donde se criaron*’ [Don’t blame them; blame the corral in which they were raised].” Reflecting on such childhood experiences, he concludes, “I’ve seen the best of Texas, and I’ve seen the worst of Texas.”

Josefina “Fina” (Moreno) Zamarripa also recalls overt discrimination at her school, Bickler Junior High. After losing a penmanship contest to a better-dressed, Caucasian girl, Josefina was comforted by a teacher who affirmed that Josefina’s handwriting was as good as that of the winner. Josefina recalls saying, “Look at her

[skin color]! Look how she's dressed! That's why she won!" She concludes the tragic story, "I felt so sad. I cried and cried and cried."

Sabino "Pío" Rentería remembers how an African-American teacher at Blackshear Elementary School treated Mexican students. He says that if a "Mexican" child borrowed a pencil, for instance, "[the teacher] would pick it up with a Kleenex, break it in half, and throw it away!" Later, at Austin High School, a teacher would announce to his class, "If our forefathers had not been so stupid and allowed your people [Mexicans] to come to the United States, we wouldn't be having the problems we do today."

An Attempt to Erase "Brownness"

As noted in the case of Sophie Lemmon (a.k.a., Sofía (Pérez) Ávila), many Mexican children were subject to the Americanizing forces of the U.S. public school system. For many Mexican children, this Americanizing influence began with the children receiving new, "American" names. María Luz Salinas well recalls the new names that she and her siblings received: She was named "Mary Lucy," her sister, María Alicia, became "Mary Alice," and their brother, Benito, was now "Benny." The examples of such name-changing by teachers in Austin schools are too numerous to cite. Gregoria "Georgia" (Acosta) Esquivel recalls that there were two Gregoria's in her class, such that her friend received the name "Gloria," while she received the name "Georgia," a name she continues to use nearly 75 years later. With a mix of humor and frustration in her voice, Paula "Pauline" (Robles) Ávila speaks of the challenge of recently trying to obtain her social security benefits: Her baptismal certificate lists one name (viz., Paula), and other forms of identification list another name (viz., Pauline). When agency officials were suggesting that they could not accept that she is "Pauline," she retorted, "You, White people, gave me that name!"

In an era before bilingual education and "English as a Second Language," "Mexican" children were not allowed to speak Spanish in Austin schools. Guadalupe (Briseño) Felán recalls, "We were all Hispanic, but we weren't allowed to speak Spanish. It was 'illegal.' I remember Ms. Pillow hitting us on the hand with a ruler if we spoke Spanish. You could not speak Spanish!" Another East Austin resident similarly recalls, "I was whipped and hit with a ruler for saying any

word in Spanish. You couldn't even say 'no' with a Spanish accent!" Dorothy Portillo adds, "If we did [speak Spanish], we were sent to the principal's office." Dorothy remembers her father's response to the situation: "My dad said, 'When you're at school, you speak English. When you're home, you speak Spanish.'"

Petra "Patsy" (Estrada) Gonzales explains, "You weren't allowed to speak Spanish [at school]. You'd be punished. You'd have to stay after school. Spanish was all we spoke [at home], so sometimes we'd slip." Josefina "Fina" (Moreno) Zamarripa tells the story of how one such "slip" at Bickler Junior High led to her dropping out of school. She shares,

We were playing outside, and I screamed at my friend, Natalia, to hit the ball hard. I said, "Natalia, ¡batéale fuerte!" Mrs. Roberts came and slapped me so hard [that] I went blind and fell to the ground. She slugged me, and everything went black. All she said was, "Get up!" I never went back to school.

Many other children tell stories of how they wet themselves at school because they couldn't communicate in English their need to go to the restroom. Richard Rendón shares, "I was brought up in a strictly Spanish environment. I had to go to the bathroom [one day], and I didn't know how to say it. [But they simply said,] 'You're not in Mexico! Speak English!'" Irene (Sánchez) Ramírez similarly remembers:

When we [Mexican-American children] were in the first grade, we didn't speak a word of English. We couldn't even ask to go to the restroom, and a lot of children wet their pants. We grew up thinking the restroom was called a "beescoos" in English, because we didn't understand [the expression], "May I be excused?" So when we needed to go to the restroom, we said, "Beescoos! Beescoos!"

Because of such traumatic experiences, many Mexican-American children grew up unwilling to speak Spanish—the language of their parents—with their own children. Some children were so affected by such treatment that they never allowed their children to speak Spanish.

A “Brown” School and a “Brown” Park

During a time of increased segregation, Mexican and Mexican-American children attended Mexican schools and played in Mexican parks. Zavala Elementary was founded in 1936 as one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal” projects for the Mexican children of Buena Vista. *Parque Zaragoza* in Upper East Austin was also established by the City of Austin as a segregated park for the Mexican community.

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro shares, “The Mexicans went to Zavala [Elementary School], and the Anglos went to Metz.” Because her family had moved to the predominantly-Anglo neighborhood on East Holly Street, Lela was one of a handful of Mexican-American children who attended Metz Elementary. One block from the school, the swimming pool at Metz Park was also segregated. Lela says, “They didn’t allow Mexicans [into the pool], but we got in, because I was a friend of all the Anglos. But all the other Mexicans had to go to Zaragoza Park to go swimming.” In her own inimitable style, Lela shares, “The lifeguard would turn [Mexican] people away, [saying,] ‘You can’t come in here.’ If you were Brown, you went the other way, honey!” Because of her assimilation into the Anglo community of Lower East Austin, Lela says she never really experienced discrimination due to her race.

Gregoria “Georgia” (Acosta) Esquivel remembers how Mexican children were not permitted at the Metz swimming pool. “You couldn’t use it,” she says. “White people went there.” Instead, Mexican and Mexican-American children were confined to their own park and swimming pool at Zaragoza Park, where it was rumored that swimmers would come in contact with *pulgas* (fleas) and *piojos* (lice). Helen (Mendoza) Morales, who lived near Zaragoza Park, remembers, “[As children,] we were not allowed to go to Zaragoza swimming pool. [The people said] you would get *piojos*!”

Frances (Mozqueda) Torres remembers, “We couldn’t go swimming at Metz. We weren’t allowed. We couldn’t go down that way [south of First Street].” Her husband, Pedro “Pete” Torres, speaks of the consequences of such trespassing: “We’d get beat!” His friend, Sixto Ramírez, affirms, “We’d get beat, but we put up some big battles!”

Battles Waged

José “Joe” Ávila remembers such battles between the boys of *La Loma*, the Mexican district between Eighth and Tenth Streets in Upper East Austin, and the Caucasian community. He shares:

We would go over to the *barrio* of Whites, west of Congress. Twenty to thirty of us went with baseball bats and chains. We went over to fight by hand and to beat the hell out of them. I was with [the] *La Loma* [gang] for a time. *Los de La Loma eran los más gallones* [Those from the *La Loma* gang were like the toughest of fighting cocks]. [The Whites] didn’t come over here [to the Eastside]. They were afraid. If you were with *La Loma*, they didn’t touch you.

Due to his light complexion, Richard La Fuente had one altercation with members of *La Loma* while walking to Zaragoza Park from his parents’ store at East Seventh and Webberville. He says,

I had my swimming trunks in my hand, and all the boys of *La Loma* were sitting there, waiting on the handrail of the bridge. They said, “Where are you going, White boy?” I said, “Swimming.” They said, “No, you’re not. Not here.” I couldn’t swim there [at Zaragoza Park] ‘till I made friends with the boys of *La Loma*: “Mamula,” “Clavo,” “La Rata” and Steve Mendoza. They were mean gang members, and one of them carried a pistol.

Richard also recalls the incidents that propelled him to take up—and to quit—boxing.

Abel Soriano always carried two pearl-handled pistols. One night, I heard one “click” at the bar, and he said, “You’re going to buy beer the rest of the night.” [Abel] was a prizefighter, so I went to Zaragoza Park to start training. One day, they said, “They have someone waiting [to fight] you.” It was my cousin, Lupe La Fuente, a professional fighter. I knew good and well I wasn’t going to beat him, so I “got the mumps,” hung up my gloves, and went to the movies.

Richard's friend, John Cázares, shares similar stories of boxing in East Austin. He recalls one day sparring with his friend, A.B. Oswaldo Cantú. John says, "I punched him on the nose, and he started bleeding. When it stopped, he said, "Let's continue." I said, "No, I'm through," and I took off the gloves.

Battles with Lice?

José "Joe" Ávila affirms that the Zaragoza pool really didn't have an infestation of lice, as the rumor had held. The weekly inspection for lice, however, was a ritual at nearby Zavala Elementary School. Paula "Pauline" (Robles) Ávila recalls that teachers at the school would part each child's hair with two pencils, looking for any sign of lice. As a result, Paula says, "on Sunday, mother spent all day bathing us and checking us [for lice], so that [our teachers] wouldn't send us home on Monday."

Hermelinda recalls that such a lice check was her most humiliating moment at Brooke Elementary. She tells the story:

I was in the fifth grade, and I always dreaded [the weekly lice check]. They were doing the lice check, and, of course, they found lice on me. I was the only one. There were three teachers per grade, [so my teacher] called the other two, and they explored my hair with a pencil – all in front of the class!

Reduced to Picking Cotton

As the African-American population moved north to avoid the segregationist tendencies of the Southeastern United States, the economy of Central Texas easily accommodated Mexican immigrants. According to Tretter and Adams (2011), Mexicans were "an economic underclass and...an easily exploitable labor force." Even today, in fact, many Mexican-Americans live with memories of growing up working in the cotton fields, an act of manual labor more often associated with African-American slaves of the Southeastern United States than with the "Mexicans" of Central Texas.

As a result of the language barrier and the need to help support their families, many Mexican-American children suffered educationally. In order to survive, some children did not even enter

school. A native of Robstown in East Texas, Jesse Niño was orphaned at age 7 and needed to support himself. From an early age, he says, “picking cotton was all I ever did. Just work and work and work and work, and they never sent me to school.” Every year, he would travel to Taylor and Lubbock to pick cotton, and, at age 16, he moved to Austin, to live with an aunt on Santa Rosa Street. Jesse began attending night classes at Austin High School, and he learned to read and write in English. In 2010, at age 83, he spoke only English.

Vidal Limón remembers, “Everyone worked in the fields, picking cotton. I did a lot of picking cotton, too.” He recalls following the cycle of cotton harvests throughout Texas with his family: They would pick cotton in South Texas in July, in Central Texas in August and September, and in West Texas from October through December.

Because many of the Mexican and Mexican-American families of East Austin were migrant workers, they traveled throughout the state and nation, and their children missed out from considerable instruction time in school. Because the children were working in the cotton fields, Sixto Ramírez remembers, “there were not many students in class” until they returned to Austin from West Texas. Gregoria “Georgia” (Acosta) Esquivel explains the challenge with students not wanting to return to school “A lot [of children arriving in Austin after picking cotton throughout Texas] didn’t want to go back to school. They were embarrassed that they were so far behind!” All in the family picked cotton together, and children progressed from filling orange sacks with cotton, to filling potato sacks, to filling the 100-pound bags carried by adults. Some adults gathered 500 pounds of cotton per day. Elders even tell stories of how crop-dusters sprayed pesticides onto the fields while they and their family members were working in them. They often wore gloves and long sleeves, returning to the sprayed fields the next day to find them scorched by the chemicals that sent some of their children to the hospital for days at a time.

Hermalinda Zamarripa shares her memory of how unpleasant it was to pick cotton. She says:

Until I was 12 years old, [my parents] would ship us off to West Texas to hoe or pick cotton, to be able to buy school clothes. Mom would send us off with a pillowcase to gather cotton. No gloves. We just had to get out there and work.

The truck would pick us up, and she would send us out with bean tacos.

Gonzalo Barrientos shares the story of how picking cotton made him begin to question his place in the world. He says,

One day, when I was fourteen years old, I was in the middle of a cotton field. I was dirty, sweaty and disgusted with having to pick cotton. The owner of the farm drove up in a new car, with air conditioning. I asked myself: Why was I in the middle of the field, and why was that guy in that comfortable car? Seeing the inequities as I grew up, feeling that feeling of inferiority, of weakness, of no hope, of being disliked, and not understanding why – that’s why I got into politics!

With the introduction of new technologies for picking cotton, Gerardo “Harry” Esquivel remembers that Mexican and Mexican American laborers were no longer needed. He says, “They started using machines around 1955, so they didn’t need the people anymore. That left people out of work.” Santo Julio “Buddy” Ruiz seriously laments that he never had the experience of picking cotton. He says, “With the mechanization of agriculture, jobs were lost. I didn’t see it; I was a city kid. I never picked cotton. They would never let me go. I thought it would be fun!”

Migrant Workers

Many Mexican and Mexican-American families in Austin still remember their travels out of state to work in the fields of the Midwest. Antonio “Tony” Quiroz recalls that he yearly traveled to Wisconsin with his family during the first eighteen years of his life. As a result, he says, so many Austin families continue to reside in Racine, Wisconsin today, including the Quiroz, Velásquez and Cruz families. He recalls leaving for Wisconsin every May and returning to Austin in the beginning of November. At age eight, he began working in the fields, and by age ten, he was driving a tractor.

Josefa (Valdez) Salinas, now a centenarian, remembers picking cotton, melon, watermelon, corn and sugar cane for ten cents an hour. She says, “*Trabajé como una negra en el rancho: puro trabajo de hombres,*

pero lo hicimos nosotras mismas" (I worked like a slave in the fields: It was men's work, but we, women, did it ourselves."

Living in Poverty

A native of Brennan who made her home in Austin at age 13, Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña recalls the burden of being the oldest of 14 children. Her father died of appendicitis when she was three years old, leaving Mary Lou destined to a life of picking cotton, which she began at a young age. She recalls how her mother fed 14 children with a single chicken, often having only the chicken's feet or head for herself. Helen (Mendoza) Morales remembers similar stories of scarcity. She says, "Grandma Mendoza was very poor. I hated to stay [at her house]. For dinner, we'd have a [single] spoonful of *picadillo* [ground meat]."

Farther back in time, Josefina "Fina" Zamarripa remembers life after the Great Depression of 1929. She recalls:

We had no money, even to buy beans. My brother shined shoes to buy potatoes or kerosene for the stove. My mother sent me to wash the neighbors' dishes and to sweep their alleys. They were as poor as we were, so they'd give me two slices of bread or a taco. Sometimes they couldn't even give us a nickel, [but] just a tortilla. A dozen eggs had to last a week for us all. My mother used to make tortillas. She'd give us half [a tortilla] and tell us to keep the other half under our arm, to keep it warm. There was no kerosene to heat it up. Those *mexicanos* who had light, we thought they were rich. We just had a kerosene lamp!



Sofía (Pérez) Ávila and her mother, Agustina Limón, with the oil lamp that lit their East Austin home at night..

Josefina's daughter, Hermalinda Zamarripa, adds a corrective to her mother's story. She says, "My mother worked all day long, and

they gave her a single tortilla—which she had to share with her family!” Hermelinda recalls stories of how her grandmother used to daily send the eight-year-old Josefina down to the trash bins behind the Piggly Wiggly on Sixth Street at 4:00 a.m., to gather food for the family. Josefina interjects, “And if the farmers were looking for refuse to feed their pigs, we’d have to go out earlier!”

To this day, Josefina says, “I don’t like Mexico.” She recalls a visit to Mexico where she learned that her sister-in-law there wears the same dress every day, sleeps on a bed of straw, and has no water for bathing. Josefina’s daughter, Hermalinda, explains, “My mother lived in utter poverty, and Mexico represents abject poverty and discrimination for her.” Josefina says, “Here in the U.S., we don’t know how lucky we are until we see how other people live.” There is no question in her mind of why her ancestors migrated from Mexico to Kyle, Texas and Carrollton, Missouri.

Gonzalo Barrientos explains the entire phenomenon in the following way:

This whole issue of immigration is more complicated than people think. You have this poor house next to a castle. The people in the poor house have a corrupt government, rife with misdeeds and drug cartels, causing hunger, fear and poverty. Of course, they’re going to jump over to where the castle is! And big business over here [in the “castle” of the United States] is saying, “Y’all come over, so we can pay you less money!”

Illiteracy among the *Mexicano* Community

During his years at Cristo Rey Catholic Church (1956-1964), Father Frank Briganti remembers founding both the Young Christian Workers and the Christian Family Movement in the parish. Of the latter, he recalls, “The assistant national directors [of the movement] lived in Waco. It was 100% English. We’d meet on a weekly basis, and each week had its theme. We’d study and discuss scripture and how to apply it to our lives. When we left [the meeting], we [made a commitment that we] were going to do something and involve our children.” Though some of the people in this movement were from the parish, there was a challenge: participation in the ministry presumed, in Father Briganti’s words, “certain reading skills and a

certain sophistication in dealing with concepts.” A large number of persons in the community did not have such skills.

Many people in the *mexicano* community were illiterate. One member of the community, who asked not to be identified, shared a long-standing joke concerning the illiteracy of minority communities. Drawing two X’s resting on a straight line, the person asked, “What this? A Mexican co-signing for an African-American.”

Like bilingual members of the community, literate *mexicanos* were also relied upon by many. Guadalupe Carmona García recalls that his father, Leonides García, an autodidact who daily read the entire newspaper, charged a nickel to write letters for people who couldn’t do so themselves. Gregoria “Georgia” (Acosta) Esquivel similarly says,

I was a very valuable asset to [my family]. They didn’t know how to read or write, in English or in Spanish. My grandmother didn’t know how to count money, so they said [to me], “You have to go to school. My grandparents [Gregorio and Macedonia (Martínez) Riojas] depended so much on me, to translate and to take them to the doctor.

An Unskilled and Semi-Skilled Work Force

By the 1940s, 90% of Mexican adults in Austin worked in unskilled and semi-skilled positions. Manuel Casas Villanueva explains, “*no había mucha educación*” (there wasn’t a lot of education). As a result, he says, his grandfather’s generation had “a lot of *pico y pala*” (pick-ax and shovel work), as they worked in manual labor. Manuel notes that the men of his generation, in contrast, worked as mechanics or in local factories – often where their labor was exploited.

When he left the military, Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles was trained as a mechanic. At that time, Father Victor Goertz introduced Guadalupe to the owner of a local interior decorating company. Reflecting on his career of thirty years in interior design, Guadalupe now says, “From being a mechanic to [being an interior decorator] was a big difference!”

Unfortunately, due to their low level of education and skills, many members of the Mexican and Mexican American community were willing to work under unsafe conditions and in dangerous

environments. At age 15, for instance, Josefina “Fina” (Moreno) Zamarripa was working at a local laundry when she lost her hand to a “mangler,” a large machine that ironed sheets – and often mangled the hands of the young ladies who operated them. While working in the St. Edward’s University laundry, Manuela “Nellie” (Pérez) Téllez also nearly lost her hand to a “mangler.” Her hand was stuck in the machine and badly burned. “All the flesh was cut off,” she says, “and it was just bones. They were going to cut off my hand. [Because of all the bandages,] it was a whole year before I saw my hand again.”

The Military as a More Popular Option

For many young men in the *mexicano* community, entering the military seemed a good option. Gregoria “Georgia” (Acosta) Esquivel says, “a lot [of guys] went into the military with a third, fourth or fifth-grade education.” A first-generation American citizen, Francisco “Frank” Granado remembers joining the U.S. Army and fighting in Germany for six months during World War II. After three months in a foxhole, a shell explosion left him nearly blind for two months. He recalls shaking when, upon release from the hospital, he learned that he would be sent back into combat. Fortunately, the war ended the following day.



José “Joe” Ávila (left) with friends, serving in the Korean War.

José “Joe” Ávila remembers that, as a young man, he was tired of driving trucks. “I was looking for something different,” he says. “I wanted to go somewhere to get away from Texas.” The military was a tempting option, helping him to realize just that, and in 1950, he was part of the Second Squadron, Eighth Regiment, First Cavalry “Fighting Eight” in North Korea. He recalls that many of his friends also joined the military at that time: Dan Dávila, Vincent Ortiz, Pete Pérez, Oswaldo Cantú and John Cantú.

Leonides “Moe” García, Jr. remembers that he joined the army in 1959, one year after his cousin, Jesús “Jesse,” did the same. When asked why he enlisted in the military, Leonides says, “It was either stoop labor [agricultural labor performed in a stooping or squatting position] or construction or the military—and we wanted to see the world.” Both young men served in the Vietnam War.

Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles remembers how his service in the military enabled him to send money home to his father, José Mireles. “I wanted him to go on trips,” Lupe says, “but instead [my father] bought the store *El Porvenir*.” For years, Lupe’s father ran the grocery store, bakery and *yerbería* on Santa Rita Street.



Leonides “Moe” García, Jr. (left) and his cousin, Jesús “Jesse” (right) standing with Leonides’ mother, María (Carmona) García, outside the family’s home on East 2½ Street. (April 1960).

Few Graduating from High School

Because of the various challenges faced by the Mexican and Mexican American community of Austin, the high school completion rate for this community was exceedingly low. As a sophomore at Austin High School, Herminia (Escobar) Gómez left her studies, so as to be able to work and financially assist her family. Her husband, Víctor Gómez, adds, “I went to Zavala [Elementary] and Allan [Junior High]. That’s as far as I got.” Irene (Sánchez) Ramírez is now able to joke about the educational level that she and her friends were able to attain. She says, “We all graduated from ‘Zavala College!’”

Father Frank Briganti explains the situation in this way:

We averaged about three high school graduates a year [at Cristo Rey Catholic Church]. Literacy and education were not a priority. Survival was. Education was a luxury. There was one junior high boy, for example: People in the community thought he would be a supreme light for the

mexicano community. His parents pulled him out [of school] to pick tomatoes in Ohio [because] they couldn't make enough money. And when we began thinking about an organized [religious education] program [in the parish], we had trouble finding teachers who had graduated from high school!

Crediting her grandparents and uncles for their support of her education, Gregoria "Georgia" (Acosta) Esquivel graduated from Austin High School in 1951. She recalls, "You could count the Mexicans graduating. There weren't many." Lori (Cervenak) Rentería adds, "Austin High School did everything they could to kick [Mexican] kids out."

Because many members of the community did not enjoy educational opportunities themselves, it became important for them to encourage their children's studies. Paula "Pauline" (Robles) Ávila says, "[My husband] Joe studied through the seventh grade. I made it through the sixth grade. I wanted [my daughter, Rose (Ávila) Maciel,] to study, not to be working in the fields." Paula proudly speaks of her daughter having graduated from Zavala Elementary, Martin Junior High and Regan High School.

Josefina "Fina" (Moreno) Zamarripa and her husband, Guillermo, also wanted their thirteen children to enjoy the education that they themselves never had. With pride, Josefina displays in her home the graduation pictures of all thirteen children from high school, ten of whom would later graduate from college. She shares:

All my husband talked about [was our kids going to college]. He had a third-grade education. He only had one dollar for himself, to have a beer every two weeks, and the rest was for the kids—for writing paper and pencils and colors—so that the kids could get better jobs. Once, I wanted to buy a sweater, but he said, "The money is not yours or mine. It's for the kids!" It was important [to him] that they got a high school education, [and he'd say,] "We're going to send them to college with whatever we have left."

Few Going to College

The completion of postsecondary studies by members of the *mexicano* community was extremely rare. Father Victor Goertz shares that he can recall only two college graduates from the parish during his sixteen years of ministry in East Austin: Eulalio (or Evelio) Villarreal, a pharmacist who lived in the Santa Rita courts, and Olga (López) Cázares, who studied nursing.

Seeing the adverse effects of migratory work on the academics of their children, some parents left behind that lifestyle, so that their children could settle down, attend to their studies, and thus enjoy a better education and better future jobs. As a result, more students from East Austin began to attend postsecondary studies, including Gilbert Cantú, Gloria Cantú, Margaret Cantú, Margie Cuellar, Margaret Gómez, Frank Martínez, and Doctor Robert Medrano.

The Role of Education in Creating a Different Future

As in the past, many members of the Mexican and Mexican-American community of East Austin wanted their children to enjoy the education that they themselves did not have. Many, like Guillermo Zamarripa, believed that education alone would help to create a different future for their families.

Gonzalo Barrientos recalls a few years ago when some 200 undocumented, Mexico-born students walked out of school to march to the Texas Capitol. He told them, "It's good you're here to express yourselves. It's one of the rights of people under the Constitution. Now, go back to school! That's the most important thing you can do: Go, learn!" When one girl stood up to challenge him, Gonzalo replied, "Go to school and learn, so that you can help to resolve these issues!"

"Do You Realize What We've Been Through?"

There often exists a great divide between the Mexican and Mexican-American communities of Austin. Those who have more recently arrived in the United States are unaware of much of the history contained in these pages, and those who have lived this history find their thoughts well summarized in the words of Gonzalo Barrientos, who shared the following anecdote.

I was talking to a Mexican worker one day. He was talking about “those *Tejanos*,” [saying,] “*No nos llevamos con ellos. No nos quieren. ¡Y no saben hablar español!* (We don’t get along with Mexican-Americans. They don’t like us, and they don’t know how to speak Spanish!)” I asked him, “Do you realize what we’ve been through?” We’ve been through some hard times, too. When we spoke Spanish in school, we got whipped. We’ve had [family members and friends] die in World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam. My dad’s brother, Juan, came back from Germany with both legs blown off by the Germans. You need to understand certain things about our country and about *Tejanos*. This isn’t Mexico.

Chapter Five

A New Spiritual Center in the Flats: The Cristo Rey Chapel and Mission Church

“[My grandmother] had the biggest
[home] altar in the neighborhood.”

Manuela “Nellie” (Pérez) Téllez

“One time, it snowed, and we couldn’t see the street,
but we still went to church!”

Jesse Niño

“All those *españoles*, they used to shout at you
and look down on Mexicans!”

John Cázares

“We went out for a couple of hours every morning
and got to know every family in the parish.
We knew who lived in every house in the neighborhood.”

Sister Joseph (Victoria) Moreno, S.J.B.

The “*Capilla de Cristo Rey*”

On January 15, 1932, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Father José Aurelio Prieto, O.M.I. assumed spiritual leadership of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church (1932-1941). Father Prieto was the brother of Father José Prieto, the first O.M.I. pastor of the parish. After devoting seven years to the flock that gathered at the church on the corner of East Ninth and Lydia Streets, Father Prieto began noting the spiritual needs of the Mexican families in the Flats of Lower East Austin. Having been born in Spain, Father Prieto spoke the language of the people of Buena Vista. One special relationship he enjoyed was with the family of Cipriana (Sifuentes) Pérez.

Cipriana was a midwife and widow with three children. In 1912, she walked to the United States from San Luis Potosí with her son, Leonardo Pérez; his pregnant wife, María (Serrano) Pérez; her son, Pablo “Paul” Pérez; and her daughter, Guadalupe (Pérez) Reséndez. Leonardo and María’s fourth child, Manuela “Nellie” (Pérez) Téllez, recalls her mother’s stories of the journey on foot.

At the time, Mexico found itself amid the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution. Manuela’s son, Michael, recalls the reason for the exodus to the United States: “[In Mexico,] there was war, killing, famine, mischief, lots of bad things. It was like [they were thinking], ‘let’s get out of here!’ Lots of families [in Mexico] just packed up and walked to the U.S.”

It was during this revolution that Cipriana entered the U.S. and moved to Bluff Springs, between present-day East William Cannon Drive and East Slaughter Lane. Around 1930, Cipriana learned that land was being sold on Santa Rosa Street in the Flats of Lower East Austin. According to Manuela, Cipriana asked her son, Leonardo, to take her to see the location. In the end, she purchased the south side of the 2200 block of Santa Rosa Street. Cipriana would later sell the westernmost three lots, closest to Canadian Street (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr. Street). She kept 2207 Santa Rosa, in which she lived with her daughter, Guadalupe (Pérez) Reséndez, and her daughter’s husband, Ygnacio (or Ignacio) Reséndez. Also living with them were Ygnacio’s son, Rodolfo (from a previous marriage), the Reséndez’s children, Manuela and Ygnacio (or Ignacio) Junior, and the children’s blind cousin, Elena. To the east, at 2209 Santa Rosa, lived Francisco “Pancho” and Angelita Aldava. Cipriana’s son, Leonardo Pérez, and his wife, María (Serrano) Pérez, lived on the easternmost three lots. Manuela recalls that the homes on these lots were built by Becker Lumber Company, located on East First Street. She says they were “the first homes built in East Austin.”

Leonardo was a young entrepreneur, and he built a pecan factory beside his home. After purchasing large sacks of pecans, he hired women to peel the pecans and men to wash and break them. He then delivered the packaged pecans to the likes of Austin Mayor Tom Miller, David Lamme, Sr. (the owner of Lamme’s Candies), and the Piggly Wiggly supermarket on the southwest corner of East Sixth and Chicón Streets.

Leonardo's mother, in contrast, was more spiritual. Manuela shares of her grandmother: "She always dressed like a nun: With a long dress, with her head covered, and with a long rosary hanging out of her pocket." Manuela says that her grandmother "had the biggest [home] altar in the neighborhood," around which the family gathered for the traditional *arrullo del Niño Dios*, the rocking to sleep of an image of the Child Jesus on Christmas Eve. The home altar in the Reséndez's living room soon became a spiritual center for the neighborhood. Due to the popularity of the place, they turned their living room into a community space which they called the *Capilla de Cristo Rey* [the Chapel of Christ the King]. Manuela suspects that her grandmother crossed the U.S./Mexico border with memories of the *Cristero* Revolution, an anti-Catholic campaign in which those who were persecuted rallied to the cry, "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" [Long live Christ the King!], such that the chapel was placed under the protection of Christ the King, the patron of Mexico.

Manuela recalls the framed image of Our Lady of Guadalupe hanging on the south wall of the *Capilla de Cristo Rey*. Holes were drilled in the image's frame, to accommodate several light bulbs around it. The frame was lighted for the daily praying of the rosary. A crucifix hung to the right of the image. Manuela continues, "My dad and the men built some benches and painted them. And that little room would fill up [with people from the neighborhood], and we, kids, would sit in front, on the floor."

For the celebration of Mass, however, the people of the Buena Vista neighborhood had to walk to Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. Manuela shares, "We would walk all the way from Santa Rosa [Street] to Guadalupe [Church] every Sunday and on feast days and on Christmas Eve."

On January 31, 1940, however, the Mass came to them. It was the Feast of Saint John Bosco, and Father Prieto came from Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church to celebrate Mass at the *Capilla de Cristo Rey*. Manuela recalls Father Prieto's affection for those gathered. She says, "He treated all of us with a lot of respect—especially the grownups, and especially my grandmother [Cipriana]."

Thereafter, Mass was celebrated three times each week at the *Capilla de Cristo Rey*. Six to seven families regularly attended these Masses, including the families of Ygnacio and Guadalupe (Pérez)

Reséndez, Leonardo and María (Serrano) Pérez, Francisco “Pancho” and Angelita Aldava, Florentina Chapa and her husband, Julián and Petra Terán, Mr. & Mrs. Ben Moncivais, and the neighboring Acosta, Camacho and Vásquez families. Mr. Chapa was a carpenter who would later donate long hours cleaning the mission church, and his wife, Florentina, was always extremely active in the parish, making *tamales* and assisting with *jamaicas*, the fundraising festivals that were yearly hosted by the church. Celsa Acosta, the future organist at Cristo Rey, lived with her aunt, Juanita Acosta, and her cousins, Felipe and Trini. Luis and Dolores “Lolita” Rivera walked from Santa Rita Street, as did Jesús “Don Jesusito” Vera García from East 2½ Street. Don Jesusito served as the sacristan of the chapel and later of the mission church.

A 1939 photo (below) shows some of the many persons who gathered at the *Capilla de Cristo Rey*. Manuela explains that several family members were working on the afternoon that the photo was taken, so that they are not pictured here. On the bottom row are León Pérez, Francisco “Pancho” Aldava, Rodolfo “Rudy” Reséndez, Lidia Pérez Calderón (the girl hardly visible behind the fence), an unidentified infant (hardly visible behind the fence), Manuela “Nellie” (Pérez) Téllez, José “Joe” Herrera, Teresa (Herrera) Regalado, Bertha Castillo, Concepción “Connie” (Serrano) Cavazos, Juanita “Janie” (Pérez) Capuchino, Guadalupe (Pérez) Reséndez, Ygnacio (or Ignacio) Reséndez, Ygnacio (or Ignacio) Reséndez Junior, Manuela Reséndez, and Jesusito Vera García. The women standing on the porch are María (Serrano) Pérez, an unidentified neighbor, a neighbor known as “Mrs. Camacho,” another unidentified neighbor, Cipriana (Sifuentes) Pérez,

Angelita Aldava, María de Jesús “Chuy” (Serrano) Pérez, Elena Reséndez and María (Álvarez) Pérez.



The Capilla de Cristo Rey at 2207 Santa Rosa Street.

The Original Mission Church of Cristo Rey

Father Prieto was replaced as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church by Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Father José Arratibel, O.M.I. (1941-1946). Father Arratibel was assisted at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church by Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Father John Busch, O.M.I. (1941-1954). Though Frances (Saucedo) Cuevas remembers Father Arratibel as “very strict,” the priest seems to have been a fine fundraiser. According to the history published on the parish’s website, Father Arratibel inherited a parish with a considerable debt and left it five years later with \$24,000 in the bank. Such financial means likely permitted him to dream of how better to serve the Mexican population at the *Capilla de Cristo Rey*.

In 1942, Fathers Arratibel and Busch led the project of moving an old barrack from Bastrop, Texas to the 2200 block of East Second Street. By then, a priest of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who served as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church at the time, needed money for his parish, and sold all the other lots on the 2200 block of East First Street, except the future site on which the Cristo Rey Mission Church would be constructed, and some few lots to the west of it.

A bell tower was added to the façade of the church, and a choir loft was constructed inside the front entrance. Leonides “Moe” Carmona García recalls seeing “a whole bunch of men tugging on a rope, trying to pull the bell into the steeple. We were just little kids, but they were looking for ‘manpower.’ [The entire building project] was all manpower and donated labor.” The photo to the right shows the exterior of the mission church shortly after it was moved onto the present-day parish property.



Cristo Rey Catholic Church, 1942, photo courtesy of the Archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

According to the parish history that is contained in the 1959 event program for the dedication of the new church, Monsignor Louis Joseph Reicher, the Chancellor of the Diocese of Galveston (1918-1947) came from Houston to bless the newly-constructed mission church in 1942. Reicher would later be installed as the first bishop of the newly-formed Austin Diocese in 1947. That same event program speaks of the first Christmas celebration in the mission church: “There are fond memories now of how, at the first Christmas, there was neither water, gas, nor light. Oil lamps were used for light. A violin took the place of the traditional organ. About 150 people assisted at Mass.”

The photo below shows the inside of the mission church decorated for Christmas 1943 or 1944. Electric lights were now installed from the ceiling over the assembly and on the sanctuary walls. Six large metal posts supported the flat, tiled ceiling. At least seven rows of wooden benches filled the wooden floor. Striped wallpaper covered the walls, and white cloths hid the communion rail. A gate in the communion rail separated the assembly from the main altar, at which the priest would celebrate Mass with his back to the assembly. A statue of Christ the King stood atop the main altar, which was decorated with poinsettias and candles. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe from the Reséndez home hung to the left of the main altar. To the right of the altar, against the back wall, was a smaller statue of Mary. To the far right was a Christmas tree and the church's nativity scene.

Víctor Gómez recalls making his First Communion in the mission



The interior of the old mission church decorated for Christmas in 1943 or 1944, courtesy of the Archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

church around 1943. He remembers, "It was small inside, but there were plenty of people. All our relatives went there, and everyone who lived on Third and Fourth Streets." A 1944 photo shows some 24 girls dressed in white, exiting the mission church at the conclusion of their First Communion Mass. One notices that a concrete sidewalk now extends from the street to the entrance of the church.



Girls exiting the mission church after the celebration of their First Communion in 1944, photo courtesy of the Archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Expanding the Old Mission Church

Within two years, the congregation had outgrown the small church. Beginning in 1945, an addition was appended to the back of the building atop a base of piers and beams. With the addition, the church was now twice its original size. Some elders recall seeing the priests on the roof, with hammers, assisting with shingling the old church. Guadalupe Carmona García remembers that his brothers, Juan and Dionicio, assisted the endeavor. The photo below shows the exterior of the church during the 1945 addition. Because of its age and instability, the front third of the building (where the piers and beams beneath are covered), would later be removed during a remodeling project in 2000-2001. The back two-thirds remain to the present day. To the right is a small addition that served as the sacristy. A similar addition to the opposite side of the building served as a storage room



*The exterior of the old mission church during the addition of 1945,
photo courtesy of the Archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*

in which the women of the parish prepared the flower arrangements that would adorn the altar.

The photo below shows the interior of the addition during the days of construction. Various ladders and construction materials fill the space. The benches of the old mission are now temporarily placed in the center of the space, with a row of wooden chairs to the right. Wooden beams now supported an arched ceiling. This likely supported a better view of the altar for those who sat in the choir loft,



*The interior of the mission church,
photo courtesy of the Archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*

to which a piano would be moved and from which the choir would sing.

According to an invitation contained in the archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in San Antonio, Bishop Christopher Edward Byrne of the Diocese of Galveston came to Austin for a solemn blessing of the mission church on November 4, 1945. The invitation reads:

*The Oblate Fathers of
Our Lady of Guadalupe Church
Austin, Texas
Cordially request your presence at the
Solemn Blessing of the New Church
Dedicated to Cristo Rey
November fourth, nineteen-hundred, forty-five
at 9:00 o'clock a.m. by
Most Reverend C. E. Byrne, D.D.
Bishop of Galveston*

Various photos exist of the old mission church. Above the tabernacle of the main altar, on the south wall of the mission church, hung an image of the congregation's patron, Christ the King of the Universe. The altar on the east side of the sanctuary contained an image of Mary of Nazareth. After the construction of the new church in 1959, this altar would be moved to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, where it remained until, in the words of one parishioner, who asked not to be identified, "[Father] Trebtoske got rid of it." The altar on the west side of the sanctuary (to the right in the photo) contained an image of Joseph of Nazareth, and would later be relocated to north room of the convent of the Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church at 2201 East 2½ Street.

Some senior adults today still remember the steps that led up to the church. Roy Gómez says, "Those barracks were the first church I was familiar with. Those stairs looked so tall to us as kids—and it seemed forever to get to the top of them!" Guadalupe (Chapa) Gámez shares, "I loved that old church. It was beautiful. It had nice stairs, and I always pretended that I was going up into heaven!"



The interior of the old Cristo Rey Catholic Church.

Jesse explains that inside the front entrance, a staircase to the left led up to the church's choir loft. The inside of the church (which is the present-day auditorium of the *Escuelita* of St. John Bosco) was restored in 2001, so that one has an idea of what the interior of the mission church looked like. A photo (to the right) from the 1959 wedding of Raymond Martínez and Paula Arredondo Niño shows the young Jesse Niño giving away his cousin in marriage. The photo suggests that the choir loft held some 20 persons, that the mission church at that time contained electricity, and that the same white wooden beams supporting the ceiling are still in place 60 years later.



The interior of the old Cristo Rey church, with Jesse Niño giving his sister, Paula, away during her marriage to Raymond Martínez

In the photo, one can see that the men sat in the pews west of the main aisle, and the women sat in pews to the east. This was during an era in which women were required by tradition to cover their heads in church, so that a variety of head coverings can be observed. When asked why men and women sat in different sections, Cecilia (Ledesma) Serrano responds, “So we [young men and women] wouldn’t be talking. That’s what the Sisters said.”

Memories inside the Old Mission Church

Cecilia’s husband, Manuel Serrano, remembers how priests from Mexico would come to the church for missions. The men would participate in a mission during one week, and the women would have their mission the following week.

Longtime parishioner Jesse Niño recalls attending Mass at the old mission church. He would invite Pete Evans, the nephew of future Cristo Rey pastor Father Jesse Evans Euresti, to attend Mass with him, and, because Pete preferred not to sit in the front, they would take their place near the back. Jesse also remembers being part of the Mass choir in the old mission church. He met his future wife, Vicenta Gómez, while singing in the choir with her, and they were married in the mission church in 1951.

Jesse Niño recalls how people dressed up to go to church. “You had to have a *corbata* [necktie],” he shares. “Everyone had their collar buttoned, and the attitude was ‘cover this, cover that’ – not like it is today.” He also recalls how persons from throughout the neighborhood would weekly walk to Sunday services. “One time it snowed,” he shares, “and we couldn’t see the street, but we still went to church!”

In contrast to today, children were expected to sit absolutely silent and motionless at Mass. One can easily picture the experiences spoken of in a conversation between Hermalinda Zamarripa and her mother, Josefina “Fina” (Moreno) Zamarripa. In the following conversation, recall that Josefina is the mother of thirteen children, including Hermalinda.

Hermalinda: I did not like sitting with my mother at all at church. If we squirmed or talked, she pinched us!

Josefina: They were like worms!

Hermalinda: We were like ducklings, and I was at the tail of the line of ducks. I'd try to slip into a back pew. My father was probably picking up the *limosna* [collection].

Josefina: Sunday was a living hell! We had to iron [the children's Sunday clothes] all day Saturday, and I used to go to bed late, shining their shoes!

Hermalinda: There was no air conditioning, and one day, it was so hot in the church that I passed out! They took me to someone's house in the [Santa Rita] projects. My mom didn't know where I was. They found me in the late afternoon.

Josefina: Sometimes I felt like a dummy [walking ten blocks to church] in high heels and *medias* [pantyhose]. I was always pregnant. We took the Catholic Church very serious. They didn't permit birth control.

Hermalinda: And when they were building the new church, I went to catechism [classes] in the old church, which was filled with boards. I was wearing flip flops, and I stepped on a nail. I pulled it out, and the nun wrapped up my dirty little foot!

Indeed, many memories abound of the old Cristo Rey Mission Church. Guadalupe Carmona García remembers how his grandfather, Don Jesusito García (below), who lived with his parents on East 2½ Street, volunteered as the church's sacristan from the early 1940s until 1956. Guadalupe's brother, Leonides "Moe" Carmona García, Jr., remembers celebrating his First Communion in the church in 1949. In a photo of the reception that followed (to the right), Leonides is the first boy on the right, across from the Sister. He still recognizes many of his classmates in the photo: Julián González, Juan Ponce, Carlos "Chango" Hernández,



The parish reception after First Communion in 1949.

Jr., and Genaro Esparza on the left, and Gilbert and Frank Limón on the right.

Teresa (Cuevas) Estrada remembers singing with the choir in the loft of the old mission church some few years before services were transferred to the present-day church. She shares:



Don Jesusito Vera García (second to left), the sacristan at the old Cristo Rey mission church for more than fifteen years, stands in the snow in front of his home at 2210 East 2½ Street with his sister, María Carmona García, his brother, Satarino Garcí

We'd go up the creaking stairs, to sing in the choir. Mrs. [Isabel] Reyes would play the organ, and we'd practice at her house next to *El Porvenir* [a store on Santa Rita Street] each week. Frances and María and Mary Alice Ramírez sang in the choir. Trini and Celsa Acosta sang in the choir, too. So did Joe and Ignacio Pulido, Linda Villarreal, Lucille Reyes and Theresa Reyes. I was young, so I used to look up to all of them.

Santo Julio "Buddy" Ruiz remembers, "When I attended Mass at Cristo Rey, I could hear my grandparents' [Vincenzo and Annie (Sconci) Porfirio's] ducks and chickens making farm noises from his backyard [at 2226 East First Street]." Hermalinda Zamarripa adds that after Santa Julia Catholic Church was completed in 1957, "Santa Julia was closer [to our home], but we went to Cristo Rey. We couldn't get used to [Santa Julia]. Cristo Rey was like a small, country church."

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate at Our Lady of Guadalupe

Father Arratibel was succeeded as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church by Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Father Telésforo Cuevas, O.M.I. (1946). After merely five months, Father Cuevas was succeeded by Missionary Oblates of

Mary Immaculate Father Nicolás Díaz, O.M.I., (1946-1956). Under Father Díaz's leadership, the third (and present-day) church of Our Lady of Guadalupe was constructed. The church was later consecrated on the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, on August 15, 1954. During these years, the O.M.I. priests of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church were responsible for the mission church of Cristo Rey.

A Support Group for Men: The *Sociedad del Santo Nombre*

The first organized ministry to form at the Cristo Rey mission church was the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* [Holy Name Society]. Father Victor Goertz remembers that the *sociedad* was one of only three existent parish ministries when he arrived at Cristo Rey in 1955. He cautions that parish ministries sixty years ago were hardly the large, organized, programmatic groups that they are today. Rather, he says, they were more akin to contemporary support groups. "There was not a great deal of activity [by parish ministries]," he says. "[The ministries] were more just for [people] coming together."

The origins of the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* are uncertain. At an earlier point in the community's history, there existed a men's group named the *Sociedad del Sagrado Corazón* [Sacred Heart Society]. Guadalupe Carmona García shares a photo (below) of the men of this *sociedad*. Guadalupe's father, Leonides García, Sr., belonged to the



The Sociedad del Sagrada Corazón in the 1940s.

sociedad, as did his grandfather, Jesús Vera García, and his great uncle, Catarino García.

Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles struggles to remember the *Sociedad del Sagrado Corazón*. He recalls, “They had a banner with [an image of] Christ. But they were all old men, such that I don’t remember them.” He says, “They joined us [younger men],” such that one is led to believe that perhaps two groups existed: the *Sociedad del Sagrado Corazón* for older gentlemen, and the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* for younger men. Early photographs of the men of the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* show them wearing Sacred Heart medals. One might conclude that somehow the groups melded to form the Holy Name Society. Speculation exists that this change may have occurred when the parish was officially recognized by the Diocese of Austin in 1950.



Fr. Green with the *Sociedad del Sagrado Corazón* on the church steps in the 1940s.

Manuel Serrano remembers getting involved in the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre*. He shares,

I used to go to church with my cousins, Gonzalo and Pablo Serrano, and some men invited us to join. We were young and didn’t have anywhere to go. So we had meetings at the church. We talked about what we wanted to do for the church. They believed in meetings [back then]. [One person would say,] “There’s going to be a meeting!” [And we would all respond with excitement,] “Oh, boy!”

Father Goertz notes that the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre*, which consisted solely of men, assisted with many details relating to the parish’s annual *jamaica* [festival]. They also hosted a weekly bingo in the lot beside the barracks. Father Goertz confesses, “[The bingo] brought in lots of money, but I discontinued it. I never did like bingo.”



An early pastorela at the Cristo Rey mission church.

The men of the *sociedad* hosted a regular “Communion Sunday,” in which they attended Mass together. Father Goertz also recalls that one year they presented the parish’s *pastorela*, a Mexican tradition of relating the story of angels and demons appearing to the shepherds at the time of Christ’s birth. Father Goertz shares, “I have a fond memory of that [production]. One guy acting on stage forgot his lines. Another guy behind the scene kept trying to prompt him. Finally, [the man behind the scene] walked out and showed [the actor] his lines!”

For men caught between the Mexican and U.S. cultures, the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* also served as a support group, and sometimes a discussion group. Father Goertz recalls various key discussions that the men had concerning their culture and identity. On one evening, for instance, the men debated whether the language they spoke was most properly called “Spanish” or “Mexican” or some other version of their ancestral “Aztec” language. They also informally discussed the question of whether to allow their daughters to date young men, a practice that seemed to be common here in the U.S. Father Goertz remembers one man strongly asserting, “We’re not letting our daughters go out with anyone until they intend to marry!” To the man’s embarrassment, Father Goertz remembers that the next gentleman to stand up publicly described the dating behaviors of the

daughter of the man who had just spoken. Various members of the community remember that the social mores of their parents from Mexico were very different from those they encountered in the U.S. culture. Eulalio “Edward” Rendón, Sr. remembers asking Juan Martínez for permission to speak with his daughter, Concepción “Connie” Martínez. Eulalio shares, “He said, ‘No, not until you’re [both] married.’ So we married!” Gregoria “Georgia” (Acosta) Esquivel similarly recalls her father counseling her to think twice about getting married “because [once you do] there’s no coming back [to this home]!”

Jesse Niño possesses an old photo (below) taken of the parish’s Holy Name Society in front of the mission church in 1950. When asked about the group, he says, “We worked for the church.” He recalls that Spanish was spoken at their meetings, and that a number of the men were first- and second-generation immigrants from Mexico. When looking at the photo, Jesse only recalls one man, José Mosqueda, who “spoke very good English.” He remembers that the pastor in the photo, Father George Green, O.M.I., spoke Spanish and perhaps celebrated two of three weekly Sunday Masses in Spanish.



The Sociedad del Santo Nombre in March 1950.

The photo shows the men of the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* wearing the society's medal on their left breast pocket. In the photo, Bishop Louis Reicher, the recently-named first bishop of the newly-formed Diocese of Austin, is seated with Father George Green, O.M.I. and an unidentified priest in front of the mission church. Seated on benches on the left of the photo are Pablo Guerra, an unidentified man, Leandro Cuevas, Inés Ramírez and Agustín Cancino. Behind them are standing Mercedes Cuevas, Luis Rivera, Pete Saucedo, Leonides García, Adrián Ávila and an unidentified man. Seated on benches on the right of the photo are an unidentified man, Mariano Trujillo, José Mosqueda, Pedro López, and Guillermo "Willie" Zamarripa. Standing behind them are Matías Quintero, Mr. Guerrero, Charlie Uriegas, an unidentified man, and Steve Arredondo. Standing directly behind the bishop and priests are (front row) Eleuterio Loredo, an unidentified man, and Leonardo "Lee" Cuevas, (second row) an unidentified man and Reyes Olvera, (third row) two unidentified men, and Bartolo Cavazos, (fourth row) Paul Serrano, Manuel Serrano, Jesse Niño and Atanacio Ramírez, and (fifth row) Julián Terán, Joe Carmona, and an unidentified man.

The leaders within the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* consisted of such people as José Mosqueda, Willie Zamarripa, Inés Ramírez, and Atanacio Ramírez. He also suggests that Isabel "Elizabeth" Martínez, a young lady in high school, served as secretary for the society. The story is told that Father Goertz later "gave in" to two parishioners who wanted the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* to become a "Men's Club." When the parish's "CR Club" was later formed, the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre* was dissolved.

A Ministry for Women: The Altar and Rosary Society

Another ministry that existed at the mission church prior to 1955 was the Altar and Rosary Society. Father Victor Goertz notes that this group, which consisted solely of women, assisted with many details concerning the church. He recalls that one member, Carlota Ramírez, was in charge of laundering and ironing the altar linens. He shares, "She did the linens beautifully for years and years. I finally convinced her to let others help. They didn't do it as well [but it was important that others learn how to do it]."

Working Hard for the Church: Tamales and Queen Contests

The Mexican and Mexican-American community worked hard to support the needs of their new congregation. The women of the community made and sold tamales for the benefit of the church. Dorothy Portillo remembers a sort of “lean-to” that was attached to the back of the mission church, in order to accommodate the tamale-making operations of the church’s ladies.



Fr. Goertz making tamales with the women of Cristo Rey.

The community also pulled together for its annual *jamaica*, a church festival intended to raise considerable sums of money for the church. One of the chief means of fundraising for the *jamaica* was the annual “queen contest,” in which young ladies competed for a crown by raising money for the church. In 1947, Lela (Cruz) Castro recalls, the community of the mission church at Cristo Rey went up against the community of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in a queen contest. The Oblate priests who served both communities no doubt used the strategy to motivate both communities to raise large amounts of monies for the two congregations, promising a crown to the community that raised the most money. Lela shares, “It was a big event because of my mother [Vera Cruz]. Everything she got involved

in was going to be big.” Lela’s mother, the first Hispanic to be hired at the federal building in downtown Austin, was determined to win the crown for her niece, Mary (Cruz) Santos. With great satisfaction, Lela recalls how her mother helped the Cristo Rey community to win the coveted crown. Mary was crowned queen of the East Austin Catholic community by U.S. Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson in a regal ceremony hosted in the auditorium of John T. Allen High School.

Manuela “Nellie” (Pérez) Téllez remembers how Dolores “Lolita” Rivera, who lived on Santa Rita Street, used to ask neighborhood girls (ages 11-12) if they wanted to dance for the church’s *jamaicas*. Manuela shares,

Mrs. Rivera would teach us *baile folklórico* dances, and my mother was a real good seamstress. She would make the dresses. The big event [at the *jamaica*] was the girls dancing, looking real pretty, with real pretty Mexican dresses, and



Mary (Cruz) Santos crowned queen of the East Austin Catholic community by U.S. Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson.

bows in our hair. And all the mothers were so proud! We’d practice at [Mrs. Rivera’s] house or outside grandma’s home, and she’d play music on records: *Las Chapaneacas*, *La Raspa*, and several little dances.

The First Resident Priest: Sleeping in the Sacristy

Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate Father George John Green, O.M.I. (1950-1951) was the first priest to take up residence at the mission church of Cristo Rey. At first, he slept in the sacristy of the church, until a World War II barrack was purchased from Bergstrom Air Force Base. The structure was placed on the site of the sacristy of the present-day church.



Fr. George Green, O.M.I., the first pastor of Cristo Rey.

The barrack consisted of a large hall, with two small rooms, one on each side of the main entrance on the east side of the building. Father Green moved into the south room. The large hall of the barrack was used for religious education, and also for such events as dances, receptions and parties.

A native of Chicago, Father Green completed his elementary school studies in San Antonio, joined the St. Anthony High School Seminary, and was ordained at age 24. He was 34 years old when he was assigned to assist the spiritual needs of the mission church of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish. An obituary at the archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in San Antonio describes Father Green in the following way:

Gifted with a rich sense of humor and a faculty for insightful remarks, he responded to the complex challenges of parish ministry with a special touch that made people know that he understood and cared. In his limited spare time, he loved sports, hunting and fishing.

Father Green is indeed remembered by many as a sports-loving priest. John Cázares says, "He believed in sports for kids and grownups. He really was a guy into sports." Pedro "Pete" Torres recalls, "Father Green was a sporty guy. He organized softball in the neighborhood, and he organized the CYO [Catholic Youth Organization]." Pedro notes that Father Green initiated the first CYO in the city, and that the new group attracted young people from the

La Loma and Waller districts. He says that the CYO met “in the old GI barrack. Parishioners fixed it up for the kids.”

Jesse Niño recalls that his cousins, Samuel and Alfredo Casas, played softball with Father Green, but that he himself was “too old for that.” Gregoria “Georgia” (Acosta) Esquivel also remembers being part of an all-girls CYO softball team at Cristo Rey. She says,

We used to play against San José [Catholic Church] and San Francisco Javier on Lockhart Highway. Ask any of the Limones. They’ll tell you: We used to be a good team! I have to say, we were very good back then. [Josie (Guerra) Carlín] was our coach, and we used to play at the Old Zaragoza Park. Father Green was real active. He would come and watch us, and sometimes throw the ball with us. We were rivals with South Austin, and when we beat them, we really celebrated. San Francisco Javier had a good team, too. We had to really play hard to beat them. I was the shortstop, and when I caught the ball, I couldn’t believe I caught it!

The photo to the right shows the 1951 Cristo Rey ladies’ softball team. In the back row are Susie Calderón, Beatriz Donley, Helen Sánchez, Frances Rezas, Mary Calderón and Felipa Limón. In the front row are Anita “Annie” Limón, Hortencia “Hattie” Calderón and Gregoria “Georgia” Acosta.



1951 Cristo Rey softball team.

Guadalupe Carmona García recalls that Father Green started a Boy’s Club and a Men’s Club at the facility on the northeast corner of East Second and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.). Guadalupe says that Father Green purchased fencing swords, masks and chest guards, and taught neighborhood boys to fence. The house in which the Boy’s Club and Men’s Club met had been recently donated to the church by the Perry Club, an organization of Anglo people who previously hosted club meetings there.

Sarah “Sallie” (Martínez) Lozano doesn’t remember Father Green for the sports he brought to the parish. Instead, she has a very different memory of the priest. She shares,



The Perry House.

I’d sit in the front row [at Mass] with my family, and he’d be preaching. When Father Green looked away, I’d stick out my tongue, then look away. One day, I asked Father Green if he was God. I couldn’t get it straight in my mind: Who was God or Jesus? I heard [Father Green] preaching, so I asked him, “Are you God?”

Cristo Rey is Declared a Catholic Parish

In 1950, Cristo Rey Catholic Church was declared an official parish community of the Diocese of Austin, with Father George Green, O.M.I. serving as first pastor of the parish community. The change in status, from being a mission church to being a parish community, was initiated by Inés Ramírez, José Mosqueda, Agustín Cancino and Louis (or Luis) Rivera.

A letter typed by Father Nicolás Díaz, O.M.I., pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, and Fr. George Green, O.M.I., pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, to their superior, Father Kennedy, states: “With the approval of the Bishop of Austin, parish limits have been set for Cristo Rey Church. On the south and east [border is] the Colorado River. On the north [border is] Seventh Street and on the west [the parish is bordered] by Chicón Street.” These boundaries were to remain unchanged for nearly sixty years, until 2009, when the parish’s western boundary was moved two blocks west, to Comal Street.

The Ministry of the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco

Sister Joseph (Victoria) Moreno, S.J.B. explains that, contrary to popular belief, it was Father Green, and not his successor, who invited the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco to Cristo Rey. The

Catechist Sisters were founded by Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate Father Paul Lewis, O.M.I. and Sister María Guadalupe de la Paz, S.J.B. in the town of Roma, in the South Texas Valley.

Sister Michael (Nancy) Fox, S.J.B., a native of Minnesota, served as the superior of the local community at Cristo Rey. Other Sisters in the community included Sister Joseph (Victoria) Moreno, S.J.B., a native of Port Arthur, Texas; Sister John (Alma) Reyna, S.J.B., of Port Arthur; and Sister Theresa (Joan) La Vick, S.J.B. of Minnesota.

Father Frank Briganti recalls that one Sister, who was from Cleveland, Ohio, rarely looked squarely at a person; instead, she habitually covered one side of her face with her hand. "I was runned over when I was a girl," he remembers her once telling him. Some children remember calling one sister "*Box Bonnie*" [Bugs Bunny], for the buck teeth that protruded from her mouth.

Just as Father Green had once lived in the sacristy of the mission church, the Catechist Sisters initially established their residence in the "flower room" of the same building. They later moved into one of the rooms in the barrack that served as the parish's hall. In time, they would move to the old Perry Club house on the northeast corner of East Second and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.).

Sister Joseph (Victoria) Moreno, S.J.B. remembers joining the congregation in 1950, at age 26. At Cristo Rey, she recalls living in "a little bitty house" (likely the residential quarters of the barrack) and attending Mass every day in the mission church. Some eight to twelve Sisters lived at their mother house in Taylor, 37 miles away, and six to seven Sisters would regularly travel back and forth between the mother house and Cristo Rey. Other Sisters from the congregation lived at Our Lady of Guadalupe and Dolores Catholic Churches, and the Catechist Sisters would also visit San José, Santa Cruz and Santa Julia Parishes. The Catechist Sisters would later establish ministries in Elgin, Granger and Manor as well.

Sister Joseph recalls that the primary ministry of the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco consisted in providing catechesis and in visiting people in their homes. "We went out for a couple of hours every morning and got to know every family in the parish," she says. "We knew who lived in every house in the neighborhood. We had a list, but we remembered them also. We knew them and their children, and they told us their problems."

In addition to home visits, the Catechist Sisters provided adult formation on Thursday evenings and religious education classes after school hours during the rest of the week. These classes were held in the church and barrack. Sister Joseph clarifies, “We didn’t have rulers. We had a lot of fun with the kids. I don’t remember how we kept them in line, but we did. We didn’t have a whole lot of trouble.”

When asked if she remembers various priests at Cristo Rey, Sister Joseph replies, “We were there a long time. The priests would come and go, and some of us would come and go also.”

Memories of the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco

In the event program for the dedication of the present church in 1959, some four years after the they had departed from the parish, it was written that the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco “left an indelible mark in the hearts and memory of the parish because of their generous and unstinting labors.” Though few memories of them exist today, there does exist a memory that Sister Joseph led a group of girls called the *Teresitas*, in whom the Sisters tried to instill various values for young ladies.

Father Frank Briganti also remembers the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco. He says,

They were very powerful, very focused. They had no college training—well, maybe a year or two—but they gave themselves to Christ in a really powerful way. They did whatever you asked them to do. They taught catechism in the main church after public school hours, and they visited and catechized the women of the neighborhood. They would do anything to help the people.

Sarah “Sallie” (Martínez) Lozano’s memory of the Sisters is quite different. She shares, “Sister Michael was the meanest nun. She was evil! She would stand at the door and slap our hands with a ruler. I wanted to be a nun, but I didn’t want to be mean!”

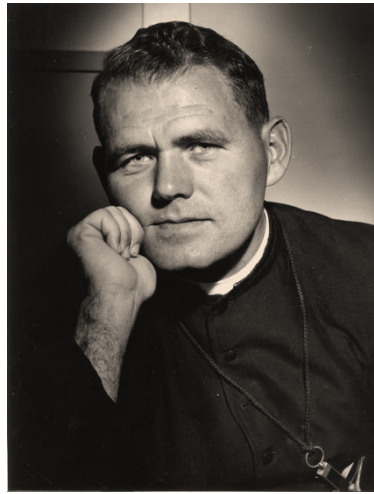
Interestingly, Teresa (Cuevas) Estrada remembers Sister Joseph as “a *morenita* [with a darker complexion], very nice, but very strict,” whereas she says that Sister Michael was “a *güerita* [with a fairer complexion], very nice, but not as strict.”

Guadalupe (Chapa) Gámez possesses more positive memories of the nuns. She recalls:

Sister Josefina and Sister Michael were awesome. They were like sisters to us. They were very, very nice ladies. We were always doing things with them, and, after they moved to Taylor, we would have night-outs with them there, praying in their chapel all night. Sister Josefina was a *mexicana*. She always told us about what was right and wrong, and Sister Michael always talked with us a lot about bullies—and how we needed to show love and not anger when other girls picked on us. We spent a lot of time in prayer, and we always ended by singing “Immaculate Mary.”

Memories of Father Olaizola

Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate Father Jerome “Jerry” Artola Olaizola, O.M.I. was named pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 1951. A native of San Sebastián in the Basque Country of northeastern Spain, he was a seminarian when the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) broke out. He was pressed into service, first in the “Red Army” of Spanish loyalists, then in the Francoist troops of General Francisco Franco. Imprisoned twice, the story is told that he was next in line to be decapitated when the war ended. At the conclusion of the war, he was allowed to continue his seminary studies in Texas, where he was ordained in 1941.



Fr. Jerome Artola Olaizola, O.M.I.

Jesse and Vicenta (Gómez) Niño remember that Father Olaizola celebrated their wedding in the old mission church in 1951. Jesse remembers going to the rectory to ask Father Olaizola to come to the mission church for the wedding rehearsal. He recalls saying, “Father Olaizola, please come and tell us how to go in [to the church] for the wedding.” Father Olaizola quipped, “I don’t know how to go in. I’ve

never been married!" Jesse says that the priest soon joined him and his family at the church for the rehearsal.

John Cázares describes Father Olaizola as an angry, "sort of mean" priest. He adds, "All those *españoles* [Spanish priests], they used to shout at you and look down on Mexicans!" Elders still remember having to explain the priest's angry reactions to some people who visited the parish office.

A Ministry for Young Ladies: The *Hijas de María*

A third ministry that existed at Cristo Rey Catholic Church prior to 1955 was the *Hijas de María* [Daughters of Mary]. The *Hijas* were a devotional group consisting solely of young women. Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña remembers, "We would dress in white and blue, and we prayed to the Blessed Mother." Janie (Alemán) Rodríguez recalls, "We used to have meetings and sing in the choir and help in the church." One event of great importance for the *Hijas de María* was their annual May Crowning ceremony.



A May crowning in the old church.

During an interview, Father Goertz pulled from his bible a photo (below) of him taken with twenty *Hijas de María*. He can still name nearly all of the faces in the photo.



Fr. Victor Goertz with the Hijas de María.

The initial officers of the *Hijas de María* were Cynthia Moreno, Francisca “Frances” Ramírez and Florinda “Shorty” Valenzuela. Some members recall that the *Hijas de María* at Cristo Rey did not have the necessary 60 girls to host a “living rosary,” as was done by the *Hijas de María* at neighboring Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. The girls, who studied in English at school, often struggled to follow the meetings, which Father Olaizola conducted in Spanish, with Spanish books and rites. On one occasion, the priest was unable to attend the meeting, and none of the girls was able to read the Spanish ritual that Father Olaizola had left them. This is but one example of the illiteracy spoken of in the previous chapter. One interviewee, who asked to remain anonymous, shares: “[Father Olaizola] would give us advice and tell us to beware of boys. He’d say, ‘If they promise you the moon and tell you they’ll bring the stars down, come see me.’ And we would.”

Buying and Selling the House on the Southeast Corner

Father Olaizola purchased the one-bedroom home on the southeast corner of East Second and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez) Streets, at 2016 East Second Street. Leonides “Moe” Carmona García, Jr. remembers that the home previously belonged to the family of Morris and Minnie Olguín. He knew the children of the family: “Chula,” Sam, Mary Louise, and “Sapo.” He remembers that the house was “a lovely white home, with a white picket fence—right where the entrance of the [present-day] church is.” The 1950 U.S. Census notes that Morris worked 70 hours per week as a “delivery boy” for a drugstore, to support his family.

This house would become the priest’s residence and parish office. The small house was reportedly very hot, so much so that the priest kept the windows of the house open all day long. With the purchase of this house, the church’s property now extended west from the mission church to Canadian Street. When the house was later moved from the property, the open area between the mission church and Canadian Street would be used for parking, *jamaicas*, sports events and other outdoor activities.

Father Olaizola also purchased the two lots on the southwest corner of East Second and Canadian Streets. The corner lot was empty, and the second lot contained a house which was later converted into the priest’s rectory and office. Subsequently, the church auctioned off the white house on the southeast corner of the intersection, and it was moved over the Congress Avenue Bridge, to an empty lot in Montopolis.

Jesse Niño recalls wanting to move the house to his own recently-purchased lot on East Third Street. He shares that his bid of \$500 for the house was not accepted by Father Olaizola, and that it took some time to forgive those who submitted a higher bid for the house. The house in Montopolis has since burned down.

The Ministry of Father O'Connor

Oblate of Mary Immaculate Father William "Bill" O'Connor, O.M.I. was named pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 1953. A native of Chicago, Father O'Connor was sent to St. Anthony High School Seminary in San Antonio and ordained at age 25. He was 35 years old when he began his service to Cristo Rey. Nicknamed "Flash" by his friends, Father O'Connor was an avid golfer and sports fan. His obituary at the archives of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in San Antonio shares the following description of him:



Fr. William O'Connor, O.M.I.

Remembered for his smiling face with bright blue eyes and shining white teeth, his great disposition displayed a zealous Oblate and devoted priest with deep love for God, the poor, and *la Virgen de Guadalupe*....Whenever he ended a liturgical celebration, he could be depended upon for singing a rendition of his favorite hymn honoring the Blessed Mother, "*Adiós, Reina del Cielo*." Gifted with a good voice, he loved to sing – and always with lots of "gusto."

Father O'Connor was the first priest to live in the newly-purchased parish rectory at 2109 East Second Street, which at that time consisted of only the western half of the present-day Convent of St. Mary Mazzarello. The living room of his home became the parish office.

Olga (López) Cázares remembers that Father O'Connor was "a good speaker. His sermons [in Spanish] were so good." Her husband, John Cázares, agrees. He says, "We loved Father O'Connor. He was good. When he talked, you listened. He'd keep you going. Everything he talked about was an experience." The priest's obituary confirms: "[Father O'Connor] was also fondly known as 'the story priest,' since he had endless tales that could bring the Scripture teachings to life." Dottie Chapa has a different memory of Father O'Connor: "He was very tall and had a rough voice: As a girl, he used to scare me!"

The Departure of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

Oblate of Mary Immaculate Father William Nash, O.M.I. briefly served as pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 1955. A native of Connecticut, Father Nash was 42 years old when he arrived at Cristo Rey. Father Nash served the parish for only two or three months. One parishioner remembers Father Goertz later telling parishioners that, prior to his coming, the Oblate priests were welcomed to remain in the parish so long as they could commit to a stable presence in the parish.



Fr. William Nash, O.M.I.

Father Kirby Garner paints a more colorful picture of these events, based on stories he heard from Father Charles Banks, who served as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church when Father Garner served as pastor of Cristo Rey. Father Garner recounts the story:

One day, Charlie said to me, “You know how y’all [the Diocese of Austin] got [Cristo Rey] parish. Archbishop [Robert Emmet] Lucey was in San Antonio, looking for someone to head Hispanic ministry [in his archdiocese], and our superior said, “I have this guy [Father William O’Connor] in Austin.” Archbishop Lucey made an appointment with [Father O’Connor] and met him at the chancery in Austin. He interviewed him and told our superior, “I’d like [Father] Bill to [serve in my archdiocese].” [Bishop] Reicher got wind that [Archbishop] Lucey had come into the diocese and taken away a priest, so he took away the parish!

Father Garner confirms hearing the same story years later from Father O’Connor. Father Garner says, “I also heard [the story] from [Father] Bill’s lips: The archbishop hired Bill away, he pissed Reicher off, and Reicher took away the parish [from the Oblate priests].”

Chapter Six

The Beginning of a Sixteen-Year Love Affair: The Ministry of Father Victor Goertz and Associates

“You must have had a lot of faith in God,
when a twenty-seven-year-old took over this parish.”

Father Victor Goertz

“Fortunately, [the people of Cristo Rey] look beyond the person
to recognize something “special” about this person –
seeing him as Christ, rather than as some young kid.”

Father Frank Briganti

“When you've finished a piece of work,
you've had a kind of love affair with it.”

Rose Tremain

“I did [have a love affair]. And it goes on!”

Monsignor Victor Goertz

The First Diocesan Priest Reports to Cristo Rey

Shortly after he was ordained in May 1952, the young Father Victor Goertz was approached by Bishop Louis J. Reicher about the possibility of studying canon law at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He recalls the bishop saying to him: “[Austin] is a university town. We need someone in this [chancery] office with a doctoral degree.” After three years of study in the nation’s capital toward a *juris canonici doctor*, a Doctor of Canon Law, Father Goertz returned to Austin in June 1955 and began to serve as part-time secretary for the bishop.

At that time, Father Goertz shares, there were only three diocesan priests in the entire city of Austin: Father Edward Matocha at St. Louis King of France Catholic Church, Father Maurice Diesen at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, and Father Goertz at the chancery. All other parishes in the city were staffed by religious communities: the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate served the communities of Cristo Rey and Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Paulist Fathers served the community of St. Austin, and the Congregation of Holy Cross served the communities of St. Mary, St. Ignatius, San José, Dolores and Holy Cross. Saint Julia Catholic Church would not be established until 1957.



Fr. Victor Goertz.

After Father Goertz had been at the chancery for only two weeks, Bishop Reicher confided to him his plans for Cristo Rey Catholic Church in East Austin. Father Goertz recalls the bishop sharing, “You know the Oblates have had Cristo Rey for a while, but they’ve had four priests there in five years. I told [the Oblates] that if they pull out [Father] Bill O’Connor, I’m putting a diocesan priest there.” At that time, it was rumored that Father O’Connor, the pastor of Cristo Rey, might soon be named director of the Southwest office for Hispanic ministry of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The bishop continued, “I’ve asked [Father] Conrad Kinder [of the Diocese of Austin] to go to Cristo Rey. You, go and take care of it for two weeks, ‘til Kinder gets there.” Father Goertz recalls arriving at Cristo Rey on a Thursday. The following day, he announced at the parish’s Holy Hour that he would serve the parish for two weeks.

After two weeks, however, Father Goertz learned that Father Kinder, who then served as the pastor of Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Martindale, had a change of heart: He wanted to remain in a rural parish. A few more weeks passed, and no replacement for Father Goertz was in sight. After six weeks at Cristo Rey, he recalls a noontime conversation with the bishop while standing in the breezeway of the chancery. Father Goertz said to the bishop: “I’ve been [at Cristo Rey] for six weeks, and I like it a lot. The people are saying, ‘Why don’t you stay?’ We both know they’ve had

four priests in five years. This is my question: Do I stay, or do I leave?" The bishop thought about the matter for some few seconds, and then announced, "You stay."

Father Goertz's First Year: 1955-1956

While ministering to the community of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, Father Goertz continued to serve as part-time secretary to Bishop Reicher, a position he would hold until 1963. Until noon each work day, he tended to the details of the chancery, which, at that time, was located in two rooms on the first floor of the Newman Center, inside a girls' dormitory at The University of Texas at Austin. It was Father Goertz's job to establish the diocese's first tribunal in the facility's sun porch. At that time, he and his fellow diocesan priests, Father Edward Matocha and Father Maurice Diesen, did not handle a great number of canonical cases. He also recalls the relaxed atmosphere of the chancery. "[Bishop Reicher] would come into the chancery, and leave right after lunch. The diocese was a loose confederation of individual parishes, pretty much doing their thing. There wasn't much going out of the chancery. [Priests] just did their thing."

In the afternoons, having left behind life at the chancery, Father Goertz was at Cristo Rey, learning how to be a parish priest. He recalls what he told the people of Cristo Rey when he returned to the church for a parish mission in the 1970s: "You must have had a lot of faith in God, when a twenty-seven-year-old took over this parish. I was young!" He now adds, "I was learning, and the people were teaching me what it means to be a *parroquia*, a *familia* [a parish, a family]." To this day, Father Goertz speaks of Cristo Rey as his home. He shares, "[Cristo Rey] was home. I have two homes: where I grew up [with my family], and where I grew up as a priest [at Cristo Rey]!"

When asked about memories of Father Goertz, many people readily share tender words. One parishioner recalls, "He was very young, very handsome, and very kind. And he would pray a lot." Manuel Serrano says, "Father Goertz was a dandy," and his wife, Cecilia (Ledesma) Serrano adds, "*Y tenía mucha paciencia* [and he had a lot of patience]." Gregoria "Georgia" (Acosta) Esquivel echoes this sentiment. Forty years after he left the parish, she says, "I remember Father Goertz very well. Everybody just loved him. He was so patient." Sixto Ramírez says, "Everyone remembers Father Goertz," to which

his friend, Pedro “Pete” Torres, adds, “He was the first priest [at Cristo Rey] who ‘became’ a Mexican. He grew up with us.” Pedro remembers that Father Goertz married him and his wife, Frances (Mosqueda) Torres. Frances (Saucedo) Cuevas describes Father Goertz as “a real nice Father, real gentle and polite,” and her son, Louis Cuevas, says, “He had a lot of charisma. He was very charismatic. He helped families, and he was easy to talk to.” Amelia (Vallejo) Pérez notes that Father Goertz was “very nice, respectable, and always real quiet.” In 1971, the years in which the priest left the parish, Amelia would name her newborn son, Victor, after him.

Father Goertz remembers that six months after his arrival at Cristo Rey, during January of 1956, he caught the mumps. He thus needed to absent himself from parish ministry for some time of recovery with the Daughters of Charity at Seton Hospital, which, at that time, was located on 26th Street, near The University of Texas at Austin. He called Father Peter Dunn, a classmate from the Catholic University of America, who was now serving as director of Boys Town in Omaha, to fill in for him. During the visiting priest’s first weekend at Cristo Rey, Father Goertz asked him, “Pete, can you go over [to the church] and hear confessions? They’ll mostly be in Spanish.” Because Father Dunn spoke no Spanish, he asked how he might do so. Father Goertz explained, “You listen to [the people], and when they finish, say to them ‘*un Padre Nuestro*’ [‘one Our Father’] and give them absolution [in English].” Father Goertz recalls practicing that phrase, *un Padre Nuestro*, various times with the visiting priest, before sending him off to the confessional in the church.

Father Goertz also worked to perfect his Spanish during that first year at Cristo Rey. He had previously studied Spanish five hours per week at St. John Seminary in San Antonio, where he completed his theological studies. During his last two years of study there, he had one course in Spanish each year, and he prepared various three- to four-minute homilies there in Spanish. “I felt confident in Spanish,” he says. He recalls soliciting feedback on his Spanish from Florinda “Shorty” Valenzuela, María “Mary” Ramírez, and María Alicia “Mary Alice” Ramírez, who served as the parish’s money counters on Sundays. One day, when he said, “O.K., let’s critique [the Spanish of] my Sunday homily,” he recalls them replying, “You speak [Spanish] better than us!”

Reflecting on his first year of ministry at Cristo Rey, Father Goertz summarizes, “There was nothing extraordinary about that first year by myself, and yet each day was extraordinary. Each day was new. It was a very pleasant, a very gratifying year.”

Early Jamaicas at Cristo Rey

Father Goertz remembers that one week after his arrival, parishioner and state employee Vera Cruz told him, “It’s important for you to know [that] we have a *jamaica* coming up.” That year, and for some years after that, the parish *jamaica* was hosted on East Third Street, on the property to the west of the A.B. Cantú/Pan American Recreation Center, which opened in 1956.

During his early years as pastor, Father Goertz remembers chairing the *jamaica* for six or seven years. He then had an idea. He shares, “I went to Marcelo Arocha, who ran La Perla [a bar on the northwest corner of Sixth and Comal]. I convinced him to head up the bazaar, the *jamaica*. We did better [financially] that year, and I told him, ‘It’s because of you!’”

Early parish *jamaicas* were characterized by three features: (1) All the ministries of the parish worked together to raise funds as a single, united, parish community, rather than as separate groups, (2) all food and drink items were donated, so that the church never incurred any expenses, and (3) if any food or drink items were left over at the end of the evening, people would buy back those items from the church.

Expansion of the Parish Rectory

Father Goertz requested that a second priest be assigned to assist the spiritual needs of the parish. When he learned that he would soon receive his first associate pastor, he scrambled to formulate a plan for accommodating the new priest. “We needed to find a way for two guys to live here [in the rectory],” he says. Father Goertz decided to join the two houses on the southwest corner of East Second and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez Jr.) Streets. He hired a contractor who joined the two houses into a U-shaped structure.

The Arrival of Father Frank Briganti

In June 1956, after Father Goertz had been serving the Cristo Rey community for one year, Bishop Reicher assigned Father Frank Briganti to assist him as associate pastor of the parish community. A native of Pittsburgh, the young Father Briganti studied at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and, inspired by John Hugo and Dorothy Day, was a conscientious objector during the Korean War.

Father Goertz specifically remembers Father Briganti's ordination to the priesthood in 1955.

Noting that he means no disrespect to the deceased bishop, Father Goertz shares, "It was common knowledge among the presbyterate that [Bishop Reicher] was terrible at reading Latin. When I assisted at ordinations, he would say to me, 'Make sure I do it right.'" During an era in which heavy emphasis was placed on the "form" and "matter" of the Church's sacraments, Bishop Reicher highlighted words in the pontifical, the rite used during ordinations, so as to remember to be extremely careful with the pronunciation of certain words. Father Goertz recalls that during Briganti's ordination rite, "[Bishop Reicher] came to certain words, and he stuttered. I simply put my hand on the book, to calm him down."



*Fr. Briganti (right)
& an unidentified man in 1956.*

Father Briganti does not describe the bishop as a particularly calm man, since Father Briganti was the first and only priest to be formally suspended by the bishop. However, he says the bishop had various endearing qualities. "Reicher wasn't stuffy at all. He was as comfortable as an 'old shoe.' He thought of nothing but building and making money, and he had an engaging sense of humor. When you'd look to kiss his ring, he'd joke, 'It's in my hip pocket!'" Father Briganti describes Bishop Reicher as



*Fr. Goertz (right) & Fr. Briganti (left)
with a girl from Cristo Rey.*

a kind man, profoundly ignorant of Christianity, [and] an administrator's administrator. He didn't know shit from shinola, and he certainly didn't know what was going on. At 5:00 p.m. [each evening], he went home to Oak Hill to work in his tool shed, and he only came out when he had to confirm somebody.

Father Briganti shares one humorous incident from Bishop Reicher's celebration of Confirmation at Cristo Rey:

In a world where "matter" and "form" were so important, I always wondered if [Bishop Reicher's] Confirmations were valid. He'd come down the line [of students to be confirmed], he'd slap his thumb on [the forehead of] a kid, and if he didn't know how to pronounce the [kid's] name – like "Guadalupe" – he'd give you another name! During one of Reicher's visits to the parish, one young boy, cute as a button, asked him, "Are you the captain of these people?" [Bishop Reicher] repeated that for years. [He'd say of Cristo Rey:] "This is the place where they call me the captain!"

After a bad experience with an explosive pastor at St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church in Waco, Father Briganti was more than happy to be assigned to assist the spiritual needs of the Cristo Rey

community. Moreover, he was a good fit for the young pastor of Cristo Rey. He shares, “[Father Victor Goertz] was 26. I was 26—just one month younger. Psychologically, an older [priest] couldn’t be here [at Cristo Rey].”

When he was in the seminary, Father Briganti recalls “a man [there] was talking about the needs of *mexicanos*. I thought of approaching [Bishop] Reicher to ask him [if I might serve this population]. I knew not a single word of Spanish, but it was lurking in my heart.” Upon his arrival at Cristo Rey, Father Briganti would be immersed in Spanish. He recalls,

I got here [at Cristo Rey] on a Monday or Tuesday. One of the first words out of [Father] Goertz’s mouth was, ‘You’re preaching at all the Masses on Sunday!’ [At that time,] we had one English Mass and two Spanish Masses. I wrote the sermon, and Cynthia Moreno translated it. It was immersion!

Father Briganti shares, “Theoretically, I delivered the homily—in my broken Spanish. It was a testament to the wisdom and tolerance of parishioners. The mature never laughed once—at least not in our faces. It was culture shock for them. And it was culture shock for us.”

Father Goertz remembers when the newly-arrived priest was concentrating hard on quickly learning the Spanish language. He recalls one evening when Victoria Tanguma, who regularly cooked for the priests, entered the dining room of the rectory to clear the table. Attempting to impress her with his blossoming vocabulary, and trying to communicate that he was “stuffed,” Father Briganti shared, “Victoria, *jestoy bien estufado!*” [Victoria, I’m so stove-d!].

Father Goertz says that he and Father Briganti were “totally different, but we had eight great years together.” Father Briganti also agrees that while they shared the same age, they were very different. He notes,

The Oblates before us were mostly Americans, but they were experienced priests. [Father] Victor and I were not. Victor had common sense and was unflappable. He was Mister Congeniality. I [on the other hand] was flappable and unbalanced. Fortunately, [the people of Cristo Rey] look beyond the person to recognize something “special”

about this person—seeing him as Christ, rather than as some young kid.

One parishioner recalls of Father Briganti, “In the old days, [Catholic] customs were different and very strict, and Father Briganti was a liberal. And people didn’t like that about him. Our parents were very strict about us [kids] making the sign of the cross with our thumb and [forefinger] in the form of a cross, and kissing [our thumb]. Father Briganti would get after us. It didn’t make sense to him that you kiss your finger.” With a note of disdain, she says, “[Father] Briganti got rid of the *Hijas de María*. He said it was ‘too much to keep up with.’”

Amelia (Vallejo) Pérez recalls that Father Briganti was “good all right.” She remembers that when her father and oldest daughter drowned in the Colorado River, Father Briganti came to the river and was present to the family while the bodies were recovered, and that he later celebrated their funerals.

Dorothy Portillo remembers Father Briganti as “a sweetie.” She says, “He was very gentle, nice, considerate, always poking fun at himself because he was tall and slender. He used to always say [that] if he stood behind a telephone pole, you wouldn’t be able to see him.” Dorothy also recalls that when she and the parish secretary counted the collections, Father Briganti would bring them bowls of ice cream when they finished. Forty years later, Dorothy continued to help count collections. She jokes, “We don’t get that now—and we’re counting a lot more money!”

Early Parish Staff and Volunteers at Cristo Rey

At that time, the priests of Cristo Rey counted on very limited support staff. Father Briganti, who would arrive the following year, for instance, shares that the church had no maintenance staff. He says, “We didn’t have a janitor. We didn’t have the money! The women [of the parish] volunteered to clean the church on weekends.” He recalls Victoria Tanguma, the priests’ cook and housecleaner, whom he describes, with no disrespect intended, as “sweet, illiterate and overweight.” Father Goertz added a room onto the back of the priest’s residence at 2109 East Second Street, which became “Victoria’s room.” The room contained the rectory’s washing machine and dryer, and an

external door, so that Victoria could come and go without disturbing the priests.

Richard La Fuente, a local carpenter, remembers being summoned by Father Goertz to assist with various projects. He says, "Father Goertz used to come by when he needed some work done. When anything came up, I would go after work and do it. He wouldn't hesitate to call me." Father Goertz also recalls that Candelario Saucedo, a handyman who lived at the corner of Garden and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) Streets, volunteered a great deal of time at the parish. "There was not enough [for Candelario] to do," he says, "so he was a fixture there [in the parish office]." Father Briganti notes that other "fixtures" in the office included Cynthia Moreno, who often assisted with translations; the Ramírez sisters (Francisca, María and María Alicia), whom he describes as "the backbone of the parish in many ways"; and Florinda "Shorty" Valenzuela, who was "always hanging around the rectory and doing odd jobs." Father Briganti says of these young ladies, "They were utterly trustworthy."

The Cristo Rey Neighborhood in 1955-1956

Father Goertz recalls that when he arrived in East Austin in 1955, the only paved streets in the Cristo Rey neighborhood were East Seventh, East First and Chicón. All other streets consisted of gravel. "That affected what the people's homes looked like," he says. Father Briganti adds, "The parish was considered a slum. There were no paved streets. You couldn't imagine Anglos living with unpaved streets—or with no representation on [city] council." Father Briganti remembers that, once or twice each summer, a truck would roll through the neighborhood and spray the streets with some chemical to hold down the dust. The rectory, he says, had no air conditioning at the time.

Father Goertz recalls that the poorest part of the parish neighborhood was concentrated on Santa Rita, Santa María and Santa Rosa Streets. He recalls that he and his fellow priests at the parish would make it a point to walk and visit all the homes on those streets. Father Briganti recalls one dramatic experience:

It was the coldest day I ever experienced at Cristo Rey. I was out visiting families across from [present-day] Pan-

Am. As I sat in their home, I asked, “Is there anyone else in your family?” They took me to their garage, where their *tío* [uncle] was lying on a blanket. The embers [used to heat the garage] had burned out. He was coughing and in deep physical trouble. I got really angry and flustered – because I was doing this all in Spanish. I said, “If you don’t take him into the house and take care of him, I’m calling the fire department!” I asked the [Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco] to follow up with him. I knew they would; they were utterly faithful. When they visited him, he was dead.

When asked if the neighborhood was safe at that time, Father Briganti shares,

I felt naively safe, perhaps. There was an “old-country” respect for clergy. We were elevated to a pedestal we didn’t deserve. We were safe. Once, I was in the middle of a gang confrontation on Santa Rita Street. I yelled [at the gang members], “Stop!” I was not afraid [of them. I knew that] they wouldn’t touch me.

Father Briganti shares that both he and Father Goertz shared a concern for the young people of the community, who were involving themselves in local gangs. He recalls, for instance, that an FBI agent at that time told him that East Austin had more gangs *per capita* than any other U.S. city, except for New York. He also recalls,

Juan Ponce and another neighbor had gotten into a fight and were going after one another with guns. [Father] Goertz got into his car, and I got into mine, and we were going up and down the streets to try to stop them.

The Legion of Mary: A Ministry for Young Men

Father Goertz recalls that when he arrived at Cristo Rey, there was an organization for men of the parish (the *Sociedad del Santo Nombre*), an organization for women (the Altar and Rosary Society), and an organization for young ladies (the *Hijas de María*). He noted, however, that the young men who felt at home in the parish “really didn’t have an organization.” He remembers the likes of “Eddy Torres, Gavino Moreno, and Fred Tanguma....They were hanging around [the parish]

a good deal." Father Goertz had an idea. The parish's annual mission typically consisted of two weeks of presentations: one week for the men of the parish, and one week for the women. Father Goertz decided to add a third week for the young men of the parish. He had recently brought Father Peter Nobel, an Italian priest previously serving in South America, to the Austin diocese. Because Father Nobel had no assignment, Father Goertz retained his services for the parish's first three-week mission. Shortly after that mission, a group of twelve men began to meet with Father Goertz on a weekly basis. They called themselves the Legion of Mary.

At that time, Father Goertz wanted to know the neighbors of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, and he saw the Legion of Mary as a possible vehicle for realizing that dream. At that time, he says, Cristo Rey was located in a "compact neighborhood. It was an ideal parish. I could walk from one end of the parish boundaries to the other in 20 or 25 minutes." During one meeting, he suggested that the Legion of Mary undertake a survey of all persons living within the parish boundaries. There was enthusiasm for the idea. Father Goertz created a survey form. "We asked for basic information," he says. "One question, for instance, was 'Do you attend Mass?' And people were honest: Many said 'no.'" The men then divided the parish into sections, and went two-by-two to meet the people living in the neighborhood. They recorded their findings on cards, which they brought back to Father Goertz.

Now armed with information on the neighborhood surrounding Cristo Rey, Father Goertz recalls one day asking for a novel permission from Bishop Reicher. He shares the story:

I said to Bishop Reicher, "We have information on the families who don't come to Mass. Through the men of the Legion of Mary, I'd like to arrange to celebrate Mass in [these families'] homes." [Bishop Reicher] didn't hesitate. He said, "Try it." So we did.

Father Goertz remembers in particular the Mass celebrated in the home of an elderly man on Haskell Street. The members of the Legion of Mary had visited the man at his home. When they asked whether he might be willing to host a neighborhood Mass, the man agreed.

The members of the Legion of Mary then went door-to-door to invite his neighbors for a Mass. Father Goertz remembers the episode:

When [the members of the Legion of Mary] invited [the neighbors] to Mass, [the neighbors] said, “We’re not going. [The old man is] mean to our kids!” When [the members of the Legion of Mary] checked it out thoroughly, they actually discovered that it was the kids who were mean to [the man’s] dog!

The day arrived to celebrate Mass at the man’s home, and the Legion of Mary prepared for the event as usual: emptying the home’s furniture into the lawn to accommodate those who came to Mass, and setting up a card table for the altar. Father Goertz recalls, “When [the elderly man] shook hands [with his neighbors] at the Sign of Peace, I could only think, ‘How beautiful it is when brothers and sisters come together!’”

As the men of the Legion of Mary grew up and became married, their wives were included in the group. Both Amelia (Vallejo) Pérez and Father Charles Campise recall that the Legion of Mary consisted of men and women. At that time, the group consisted of some eight to twelve people who monthly met to pray the rosary and discuss how they might assist the parish.

Memories of the Mariettes

Guadalupe (Chapa) Gámez remembers receiving her First Communion from Father Goertz. She then joined a group called the Mariettes. She recalls:

After receiving First Communion, girls could join the Mariettes. We had to do acts of mercy and “offer them up to the Lord.” I was part of that for many years, and our biggest act of mercy was going from house to house with the Sisters, asking for money for Jerry Lewis’ telethon for very sick kids. We offered it up to the Lord as an act of mercy. After the Mariettes, you would go on to the *Hijas de María*. I never did that.

Father Goertz is Named a Doctor of Canon Law

When Father Goertz left the Catholic University of America in 1955, he still needed to make corrections to his doctoral dissertation and publish 300 copies of it in order to receive his *juris canonici doctor*, his doctorate in canon law. With all the action at both the chancery and the parish during his first eighteen months in Austin, Father Goertz set aside his dissertation. He recalls overhearing a conversation at the chancery in 1957, in which a gentleman asked Bishop Reicher, "Has [Father Goertz] gotten his dissertation published yet?" Father Goertz remembers the bishop responding, "No, I guess I'll have to pull him out of Cristo Rey." Father Goertz hurried home and worked through the night with parishioner Cynthia Moreno to complete the necessary corrections. He recalls, "We were at the rectory, and Cynthia was typing [the corrections]. She'd say, 'This doesn't make any sense to me.' And I'd say, 'Just type it!'" Needless to say, Father Goertz was soon after awarded his doctorate in canon law and was allowed by Bishop Reicher to remain at Cristo Rey.

The Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church

In the early 1960s, the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco departed from the parish community. They were soon to be replaced by the Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church. Father Frank Briganti remembers Mother Augusta, the superior of the congregation. It seems Mother Augusta was the mother general of another women's congregation in Africa when a priest in Rome convinced her to be the founding superior of a new community: the Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church. According to Father Briganti, the priest in Rome sent a letter to various bishops in the United States, seeking a place of ministry for Mother Augusta,



Mother Augusta & children of Cristo Rey.

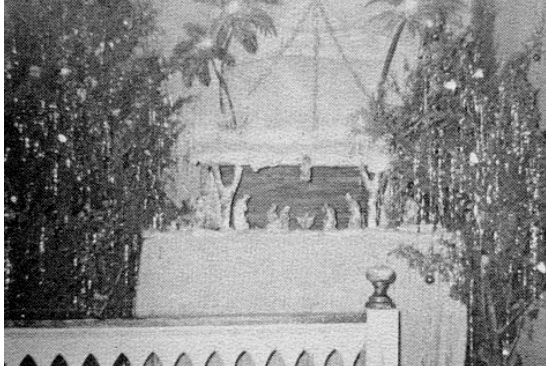
and Bishop Reicher responded with a willingness to welcome Mother Augusta to the United States.

Father Goertz says that, like the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco before them, the Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church were “the core of [the parish’s] religious education programs.”

They lived in house on the northeast corner of East Second and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) Streets. Parishioners remember the beautiful altar in the room of the house that faced East 2½ Street. They also recall that Mother Augusta was quite artistic, one year fashioning a “cave” for the nativity scene from chicken wire, butcher paper and paint.

Louis Cuevas has a different memory of Mother Augusta. He remembers,

One day, when I was six, I went to *doctrina* [religious education class]. Elvis [Presley] had just come out with ‘Love Me Tender,’ and I was wearing a button that said that. I remember a short and chunky nun [presumably Mother Augusta] calling me over and telling me I shouldn’t wear that.



. A nativity scene in the old church.

Around 1964, Mother Augusta left with her Sisters to Italy for one year. When they returned to the Austin Diocese, a pastor in Somerville offered them land on which to build a new convent. A news clipping from 1965 (to the right) shows Monsignor Edward Matocha, Chancellor of the Diocese of Austin, welcoming Mother Augusta and three young sisters back to the diocese.



MSGR. EDWARD MATOCHA, CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE OF AUSTIN, GREETES MEMBERS OF THE ORDER OF LITTLE WORKERS OF THE LORD, OBLATES OF THE CHURCH—SISTER MARY MARGARET HERNANDEZ, MOTHER AUGUSTA, SISTER MARY THERESA CASTELLON AND SISTER JOHN (JANUARY 25, 1965)



Pictured with Mother Augusta (center) are Sister Mary Margaret Hernández (second to left) and Sister Mary Theresa Castellón (second to right), both of whom were vocations from Cristo Rey Catholic Church.

Early Vocations to Religious Life and Priesthood

Various vocations to the religious life were nurtured during the parish's early years. Father Briganti recalls that Cynthia Moreno, whom he says was always "in and out of the rectory as a factotum," entered the Missionary Sisters of Divine Providence in San Antonio.

It was Cynthia who helped Father Goertz complete the corrections to his doctoral dissertation. Father Goertz remembers taking Cynthia to San Antonio on the day in which she entered the convent.

Margaret Hernández joined the recently-arrived Mother Augusta as part of the Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church. She professed her vows at Cristo Rey Catholic Church, assuming the religious name “Sister Mary Margaret.” Father Briganti recalls his astonishment on hearing of her vocation to the religious life: “Margaret surprised the heck out of me. She was not a regular Mass-goer.”

Theresa Castellón would also join the Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church. She would assume the name “Sister Mary Theresa.”

Eva Hernández joined the religious life and professed her vows. As a young lady, Father Goertz says she was a “live wire” and that she brought together many people from the neighborhood. Father Briganti remembers, “She regularly came to confession with me, and she so impressed me, but she wasn’t active in the parish as such.”

Like Cynthia Moreno, Inez Terán would join the Missionary Sisters of Divine Providence. Father Campise explains that this congregation was founded as a “side order” (or alternative congregation) by the Sisters of Divine Providence at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, since, at that time, the Sisters did not admit *mexicanas* into their congregation.

Other vocations from Cristo Rey during subsequent years would include Sister Anna Clara Saucedo, Sister Rita Cásarez and Sister Virginia Rodela.

In addition to these vocations to religious communities for women, the parish also saw a handful of vocations among the young men of the community. The first member of the parish to be ordained to the priesthood would be Jesse Evans Euresti. Jesse was raised on East Fourth Street, in the *Barrio de las Viudas*. Father Briganti remembers, “Jesse used to hang out at the rectory left and right. He was a good young man, but he never struck me as dedicated. He was sacramental, but he never articulated anything beyond that.” Father Charles Campise remembers Jesse from his seminary days. He says, “Jesse was five years ahead of me [in the seminary]. He was personable, studious and real dedicated, but I also knew he had a temper!” Father

Victor Goertz recalls, “Jesse and [Father] Frank [Briganti] used to go at it. Jesse was opinionated.” Manuel Casas Villanueva says of him, “*Era medio diferente* [He was a little different]. He was a good guy, but *bien* [very] grouchy.”

Father Euresti was ordained to the priesthood on May 29, 1965 and celebrated his Mass of Thanksgiving at Cristo Rey the following day.

Early Seminarians at Cristo Rey

In addition to fostering various vocations to the priesthood and religious life, Cristo Rey was also the host of various young seminarians who enjoyed early experiences of ministry within the diocese. Father Frank Briganti remembers that the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers (the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America) sent two seminarians at a time to the parish for at least two years. The Maryknoll seminarian captured in one photo is Tom Danaher. He recalls, “At the time of our major seminary training in New York, we were accustomed to going out in the summer, to help out in a parish or medical facility [and] to acquire [financial] help for the missions. I do not recall how I found [Cristo Rey], but two of us went there for a summer. We found it very helpful at the time, and the people very kind.”

For some years, various diocesan seminarians also assisted for some weeks at a time at Cristo Rey, including Fred Bomar, Richard McCabe, Charlie Tarnes and Joe Znotas. Of the latter, Father Briganti notes, “If Joe Znotas is not a saint, he’s close to it. When he visited, he’d even scrub the bathtub for us. He would do things like that!”

A “Love Affair”

The story of Father Victor Goertz and his contribution to Cristo Rey Catholic Church continues to unfold over the next two chapters. For nearly sixteen years, from 1955 to 1971, he shared his life and love with the people of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. And his love for the parish continues to the present day. He recounts the story of speaking with Bishop Gregory Aymond in 2000, shortly after Bishop Aymond had visited Cristo Rey for the first time. Even then, nearly 30 years since Father Goertz had departed from the parish, Bishop Aymond was hearing stories of the priest’s legacy at Cristo Rey. He later

remarked to Father Goertz, "It sounds like you had a love affair with that parish." Father Goertz replied, "I did. And it goes on!"

Chapter Seven

A Magnificent Edifice for Christ the King: The Building of Cristo Rey Catholic Church

“We went from house to house, saying, ‘please help us,’
and they would sign up for helping with five or ten dollars,
which was a lot at that time.”

Jesse Niño

“They raised a total of \$45,000 in pledges.
In East Austin back then, that was like a million dollars!”

Father Victor Goertz

“This magnificent edifice...you have raised to your Lord,
Christ the King, stands as a lasting symbol
of the real strength of your faith and hope and love.”

Bishop Louis J. Reicher

“It took a lot of nerve to build that church!”

Attributed to Bishop Louis J. Reicher

Dreaming of a New Church

In 1952, when Father Olaizola cleared the lot on the southeast corner of East Second and Canadian, he imagined that a church would one day occupy the space between Canadian Street and the barrack which had been fashioned into a church by his predecessors. Now, in May 1956, a large group of interested parishioners were gathering to discuss plans for building that new church. According to a parish history compiled in 1972, participants in this meeting included:

- Salomé Álvarez
- Ralph Arévalo
- Felix Armendarez
- Mr. & Mrs. Andrés Astrán
- Mr. & Mrs. Cleto Balandrán

- María Banda
- María Luisa Biuda de Vermudes
- Mrs. Candelas
- Arturo Carrillo
- Federico Castillo
- Bartolo Cavazos
- Florentina Chapa
- E. Contreras
- Leonor Contreras
- Vera Cruz
- Georgia Cuevas
- Mercedes Cuevas
- Lee De León
- Consuelo Del Río
- María Faz
- Lorenzo Garza
- Mary Garza
- Nora Garza
- Santos Garza
- Narciso Gil
- Crescencio Gómez
- Ángela Gonzales
- Leonor Gutiérrez
- Ascensión & Cleo Hernández
- Manuel Herrera
- Ynoscencia Herrera
- Severa Leija
- Frank “Pato” Limón
- Vidal Limón
- Elizabeth Martínez
- Manual Mata
- Demencio Mendoza
- Lupe E. Mireles
- Juan Núñez
- Guadalupe Olguin
- Andrea Ortégón
- Joe C. Pineda
- Joe Pulido
- Atanacio & Herlinda Ramírez
- Eudelia Ramírez
- Frances Ramírez
- Inés & Carlota Ramírez
- Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence Ramírez
- María Rangel
- Isabel Reyes
- Johnny Reyes
- Rosie Rodgers
- Luciano G. Rodríguez
- Carlos Ruiz
- Ben Sustaita
- Lupe Terán
- Carmen Trujillo
- Mary Ann & Sarah Uballe
- Charlie M. Uriegas
- Hermán Vallejo
- Epifania Vásquez
- Benita Vega
- Peter Velásquez
- Evelio Villereal
- Napeleón Ybarbo

Father Goertz recalls preparing for that meeting. He shares, “Ed Kreckler from Benzinger Brothers brought me a huge packet of photos of churches from all over the country. We laid them on tables all over the *barraca* [the barrack that served as the parish hall]. Bishop Reicher’s architect had also done a drawing of a possible church. I



*The vacant lot west of the old Cristo Rey Catholic Church,
where the present-day church would later be built.*



*A view of 2019 East Second Street, over the vacant lot
where the present-day church would later be built.*

wasn't trying to 'stack the deck,' but in the end people said, 'We like the [church] that was drawn.'" Father Briganti remembers that Bishop Reicher, sometimes referred to as "the Builder Bishop," would only allow a single architect to work on diocesan projects, so that, in Father Briganti's view, "[Father] Victor was handed the plans [for the church] on a plate."

The Launch of a Pledge Drive

In July 1957, Father Goertz organized a campaign to raise funds for the building of a new church. He began by creating a two-foot map of the parish territory, which he divided into ten sections. A captain was chosen for each section, with the responsibility of visiting all homes within his territory and soliciting donations toward the building project. According to a parish history compiled in 1972, these captains were: Tony Alba, Leonardo Cuevas, Narciso Gil, Jesse Niño, Inés Ramírez, Paul Ramos, Charlie M. Uriegas, Hermán Vallejo, Pete Velásquez and Manuel Verastique. According to the same source, the following people also volunteered to assist this project:

- Edward Abalos
- Rafael Abalos
- Louis Acosta
- Felix Armendarez
- Marcelo C. Arocha
- Cipriano Arrellina
- José Aguirre
- Manuel Carmona
- Gregorio Cantú
- Pete Castillo
- Eugene Chapa
- Tomás T. Cortinas
- Benjamín Cruz
- Johnny Cruz
- Mercedes Cuevas
- Anacleto Galván
- Leno Garza
- Otis Gil
- Pete Gil
- Crescencio Gómez
- Víctor Gómez
- Albert Gonzales
- Arthur Gonzales
- Ben Gonzales
- Lonnie Guerrero
- Manuel Herrera
- Domingo Juárez, Jr.
- Milton La Fuente
- Richard La Fuente
- Juan Ledesma
- Pete López
- Tony Luna
- Manuel Martínez
- Demencio Mendoza
- Vivian Mier
- Raymond Milicia
- Gabino Moreno, Jr.
- Vidal Morris
- Juan Núñez
- Thomas Núñez
- Gil Orozco
- Isabel Pérez, Jr.
- Isabel Pérez, Sr.
- Pedro Pérez
- Eloido Pescina
- José Piñeda
- Ignacio Pulido
- Pascual Pulido
- Joe Pulido
- Atanacio Ramírez
- Sixto Ramírez
- Johnny Reyes
- Demetrio Rivas
- Francisco Rodríguez

- Tom Rodríguez
- Carlos Ruiz
- Gonzalo Serrano
- Isabel Serrano
- Manuel Serrano
- Ben Susaita
- Julián Terán
- Joe Torres
- Joe B. Torres
- Pete Torres
- Senovio Treviño
- Joe Vela
- Manuel Villegas
- Napeleón Ybarbo
- Guillermo Zamarripa

Father Goertz explains that the men were responsible for asking East Austin residents for a three-year pledge toward the building of the church. He remembers, “They raised a total of \$45,000 in pledges. In East Austin back then, that was like a million dollars!”

Longtime parishioner Jesse Niño remembers serving as one of the captains for this fundraising endeavor. He shares, “We went from house to house, saying, ‘please help us,’ and they would sign up for helping with five or ten dollars, which was a lot at that time. I was in charge of East Second, East Third, East Fourth and Santa Rosa Streets.” Jesse recalls that most persons in the neighborhood were Mexican American and/or Spanish-speaking, and that only a few did not welcome the door-to-door solicitors. He recalls that Pete Torres, Eugene Chapa and Joe Vela were on his team, and that the men would visit homes in pairs.

Víctor Gómez vividly remembers helping to raise funds for the building of the new church. He shares,

[Father Goertz] turned us loose on the streets, [saying,] “Go, pick up pledges!” He said, “We need a dollar from every person.” We went to the houses and told them what the Father wanted. Pete Velásquez was the lead man, [and] I was on his team. We all got together for prayer at the church at 2:00 p.m., then they set us loose. One team began on First [Street], another on Willow. We spent the afternoon walking, and it worked. They were good people, pledging 25 or 50 cents, or whatever they could afford. That’s how we raised up the collection.

Hermalinda Zamarripa recalls that announcements were often made during Mass on the progress of the fundraising efforts. She says, “They wanted people to tithe more, give more, so they announced the

names of those giving the most. They were like [saying], “You have to give money! You have to give money!”

Securing the Necessary Financing

The amount of pledges raised by parishioners, however, was not sufficient to build a church. Father Goertz remembers his strategy: “I worked up the [financial] figures, including the pledges and weekly contributions. I was the Finance Committee at that time. I worked up a prospectus, a proposal, and took it to the KJT.” The KJT or *Katolická Jednotá Texaská* (Catholic Union of Texas) was a Catholic fraternal benefit insurance organization begun by Czech immigrants. Father Goertz recalls his first encounter with Ivan C. Parma, President of the KJT. Parma served as president of Ammonsville State Bank in La Grange, where the two met. Father Goertz shares,

I.C. Parma was very casual. He had his feet on his desk, and an unlit cigar in his mouth. I was sitting across his desk, talking about the parish, our dreams and plans, the neighborhood, and our pledge drive. Finally, we got to the ‘crunch.’ He said, ‘Father Goertz, how much do you want?’ I said, ‘\$150,000.’ His feet came off the desk. He leaned over his desk. He took his cigar out of his mouth, and he said, ‘\$150,000?’ I said, ‘Yes, that’s what I want.’

Father Goertz says the encounter ended with Mr. Parma inviting Father Goertz to a board meeting of the bank two weeks later. “I had two weeks to perfect my charts, for presenting the proposal,” Father Goertz recalls.

Two weeks later, a very nervous Father Goertz arrived at the board meeting. Mr. Parma stepped out of the meeting to greet Father Goertz in the hall. He assured the priest, “We’ll be O.K.” Father Goertz recalls thinking at that moment, “If I.C. Parma thinks we’ll be O.K., we’ll be O.K.!” He says, “I went in [to the meeting], and we came to an agreement [on the financing].” After securing the initial \$150,000, Father Goertz then visited Dennis Macken, Vice President of American National Bank in downtown Austin, for an additional \$50,000 in interim financing.

A few years later, Father Goertz recalls meeting Mr. Parma and hearing him say, “You’re doing great. You’re paying [the debt] off

like clockwork!" Interestingly, Father Charles Campise recalls the parish's struggle to meet its debt obligations in the late 1960s. He shares, "It was a financial struggle to make the mortgage payments. We usually fell short a little bit, but whoever held the mortgage would let us drag it out."

Recently, Father Goertz joked, "There's nothing better than being young and ignorant. I was confident that somehow we would do it. We were struggling, but we were a faith-filled and generous community." Father Goertz also recalls a moment of humor with Bishop Reicher and Mother Augusta, while standing in front of the new church on the afternoon of its dedication on May 31, 1959. He remembers: "Mother Augusta said, 'Oh, bishop, it took a lot of faith to build that church!' And Bishop Reicher, in his staccato voice, replied, 'Sister, Sister, it took a lot of nerve to build that church!'"

Father Briganti shares that the entire process of securing funds for the building project was a burden to the pastor. He relates, "[Father] Victor was very tight-lipped about anything that involved him, [but] the building process was a heavy burden. At one point, the project was bankrupt and the construction stopped, and he had to go searching for funds."

Let's Build!

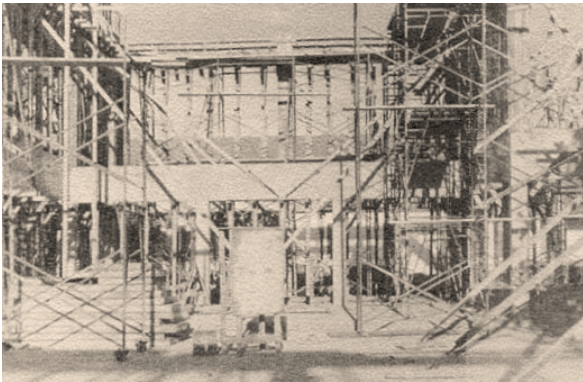
On Wednesday, March 19, 1958, the Feast of St. Joseph, some 70 parishioners gathered and made the final decision to move forward with the building of the new church. Father Goertz met with Jake "J.C." Evans, whose company submitted the lowest bid for the project. Father Goertz told him, "We've got three or four men in the parish who are good rock men." He recalls Evans responding, "Father, that's like subletting the building!" Evans agreed to take on the parishioners as subcontractors, and the contract for construction was signed on March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Construction began on Easter Monday, April 7, 1958.

Building a New Church

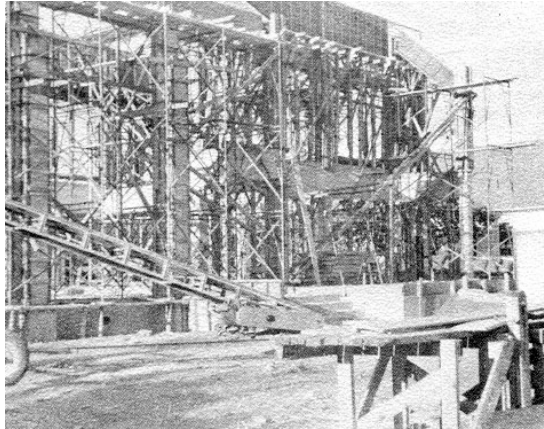
Many community members remember those sixty weeks in which they witnessed the construction of the present-day Cristo Rey Catholic Church. Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles remembers passing by the church each day on his way to and from work, and watching the progress of the project. During those weeks, Ramón Galindo was often present with his Super 8 Camera, to film the project, from which various clips still survive today.

Amelia (Vallejo) Pérez recalls that her father, Hermán Pérez, helped to build the church. She says, “He and Mr. [Narciso] Gil built the whole thing. They both worked in stone.” Tony Martínez and Sarah “Sallie” (Martínez) Lozano remember that parishioner Charlie Uriegas was the master plumber for the project, and that their father, Manuel Gómez Martínez, was often present to assist him.

Father Goertz recalls one humorous incident during the building of the church. One day, when the structure was nearly complete, he remembers coming around a corner and hearing a worker complain



The scaffolding supporting the outer walls of Cristo Rey, 1958



The construction of the present-day Cristo Rey Catholic Church, 1958.

about Mr. Truant, the architect’s “watchdog.” The worker said, “Here comes that S.O.B.!” Father Goertz, who rounded the corner at that moment, caused the worker to blush. Father Goertz said to the man, “Yes, but he’s my S.O.B.—and he’s watching you closely!”

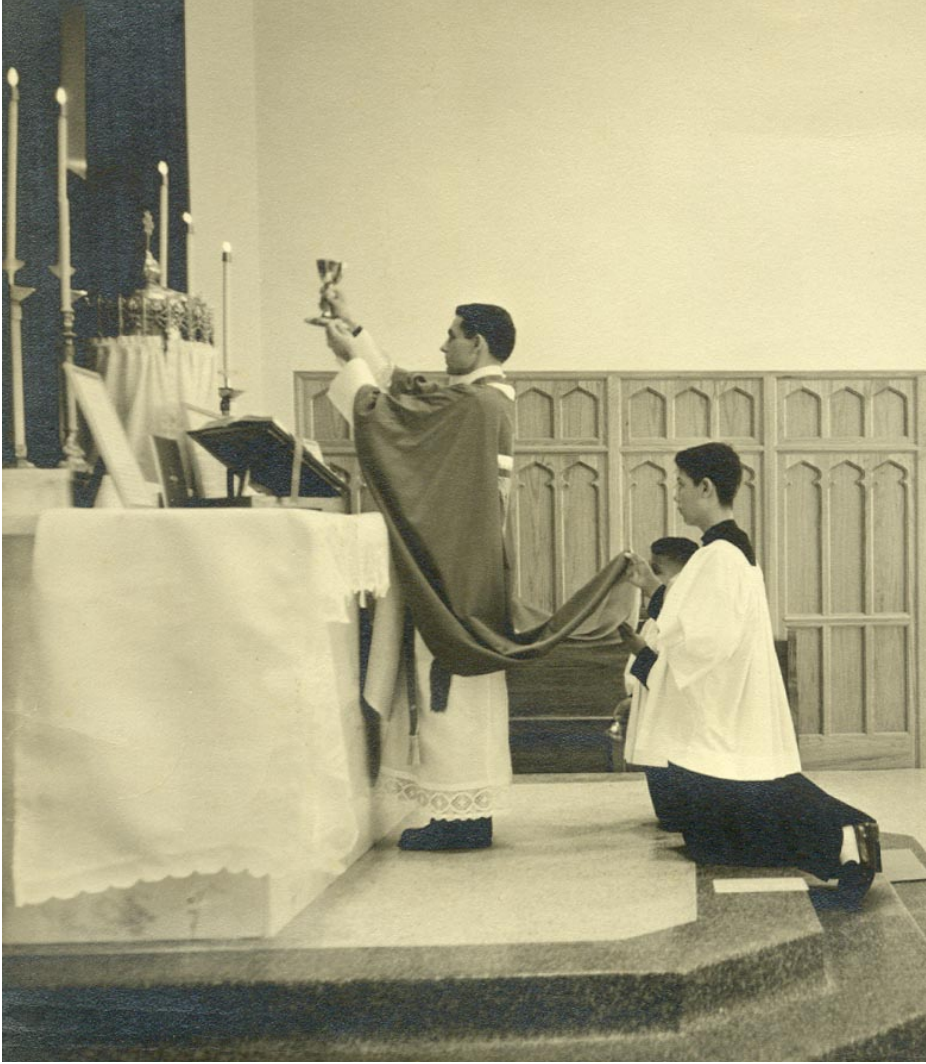
When asked about the parish's plans for parking in 1958, Father Goertz says, "When we built the church, all we needed was a permit to build. We didn't need to identify how many parking spaces we would need. All the cars [brought by parishioners to the church] at that time fit in the spaces around the church. We didn't worry about parking." At that time, of course, Cristo Rey was a neighborhood church, to which most people walked from the surrounding blocks.



Children outside the nearly-completed Cristo Rey Catholic Church, 1959.

Inside the New Church

Father Goertz recalls the main altar of the church against the east interior wall. It was made of cinder blocks and covered with a marble veneer. In the photo of the altar below, Father Goertz is elevating the chalice during the consecration. He explains that the act of acolytes holding the back of his chasuble is a "vestige from other centuries, when [priests] wore heavy vestments." The altar cards visible on the main altar, he says, contained the prayers of offertory and consecration, as well as the prologue to the Gospel of John, the "last gospel" which comprised the last words said during the Eucharist. He also notes that no microphones or sound systems were used during the celebration of the Mass at that time.



Fr. Victor Goertz celebrating Mass at the main altar of the new Cristo Rey, July 2, 1961.

Father Goertz also recalls the story of the large hand-carved crucifix that hung above the altar. "I asked my father, 'Papa, would you be willing to try to [buy a crucifix for the church]?' He didn't have any money, and it was expensive." His father, Rudolph Goertz, agreed to fundraise the necessary monies to import the crucifix from Italy. Sixto Ramírez remembers helping to hang the crucifix. "We had the equipment," he says.

According to Father Goertz, the present-day Blessed Sacrament Chapel was constructed for smaller eucharistic celebrations. "But it was never used for that," he says. Until the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the tabernacle was located on the main altar in the church's sanctuary.

The Dedication of the New Church

The Most Reverend Louis J. Reicher, the first bishop of Austin, was present for the dedication of the new church on Sunday, May 31, 1959. The cover of the event program (written entirely in English) contains a photo of the church taken shortly before the ceremony. One notices that the front doors of the church at that time were made of wood, and that the stained glass window was not yet installed in the façade of the church. A rather large deciduous tree is planted in the front lawn of the church, and another large tree is seen across the street in front of the rectory.

Inside the event program, Bishop Reicher waxes poetic in his praise of the new temple:

Beloved Priests and Faithful of Cristo Rey Parish:

The dedication of the new Cristo Rey Church in Austin is an occasion of joy for your Bishop. This magnificent edifice, so well-constructed and so tastefully decorated, expresses in masonry the deep feelings you have for your Sacramental Lord. Your faith is reflected in every stone, your love in every ornament, and your hope in your willingness to undertake this project for the glory of God. You, yourselves, are temples of the Holy Spirit, and the temple you have raised to your Lord, Christ the King, stands as a lasting symbol of the real strength of your faith and hope and love.

One wonders if the bishop actually penned these words, or if they were composed by his young secretary who himself had a great love for Cristo Rey.

Father Victor Goertz well remembers the day on which the church was dedicated. It was his seventh anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. In the morning, he celebrated the Baccalaureate Mass at St. Edward's University. He then returned to the parish for the 3:00

p.m. Mass of Dedication. Bishop Reicher presided at the Mass, and Father Goertz concelebrated. It was a homecoming of sorts for the Oblate priests who previously shepherded the community: Father William O'Connor, O.M.I. served as the deacon for the celebration; Father George Green, O.M.I. served as the Second Master of Ceremonies; Father William Nash, O.M.I. served as chaplain to the bishop; and Father Jerry Olaizola, O.M.I. served as the homilist. They were joined by the following diocesan priests: Father Maurice Dieson, served as subdeacon, Father Richard McCabe served as Master of Ceremonies, and Father Edward Matocha served as an additional chaplain to the bishop. Father Frank Briganti, associate pastor of the parish, served as the director of congregational singing, with Joe Robert Juárez directing a mixed parish choir. The event program also notes the participation of the following lay persons: Jesse Euresti (thurifer), Oscar Medel and Fred Hernández (acolytes), Frank Martínez (miter bearer), Felipe Cásarez (crozier bearer), and Ben Gonzales (cross bearer).

Sixto Ramírez and Pedro "Pete" Torres remember singing in the choir for the Mass of Dedication. Pedro shares, "Father Goertz told us he needed some men's voices in the choir. I said, 'What do I know about singing?' Father Goertz said, 'I'll teach you!'" Sixto recalls, "We had some Brother [Robert Henry, C.S.C.] out of St. Edward's working with the choir. When we started singing, people turned around to see who was singing!" "I wish we had a recording of that," Pedro says. "It was beautiful!" He shares another story concerning the beauty of their song:

Once we had a missionary who was praying in the church. He couldn't believe the nice music. He asked Father Goertz, "Where did you get them?" Father Goertz pointed to heaven. The *Hijas de María* were responsible for picking up the money for the organ, and when the guy who sold the organ came to play it, he said he never heard such a beautiful choir!

Benefactors of the New Cristo Rey Church

The following list of donors was printed in the event program for the dedication ceremony. It serves as a “Who’s Who” of parish benefactors at that time, and as a primer on liturgical necessities prior to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1961-1965).

- Altar – A friend of the parish
- Tabernacle – Inés Ramírez Family
- Organ – Children of Mary Society [the *Hijas de María*]
- Crucifix – Rudolph Goertz [the father of Father Victor Goertz]
- Candlesticks – Mr. & Mrs. Candelario Gómez, Mr. & Mrs. Óscar Cruz, Mrs. Gertrude Ramírez
- Baptismal Font – Ruth Weber
- Sedilia, Prie-dieu & Sanctuary Furnishings – Mr. & Mrs. Louis Joseph
- Rose Window – Manuel Verastique Family
- First Station of the Cross – Mr. & Mrs. Manuel Serrano
- Second Station of the Cross – Mr. & Mrs. Tomás Cerda
- Third Station of the Cross – Manuel & Lela Castro, Jr.
- Fourth Station of the Cross – Mrs. C. M. Hernández
- Fifth Station of the Cross – Mr. & Mrs. Pete Torres
- Sixth Station of the Cross – Mr. & Mrs. Joe Torres
- Seventh through Thirteenth Stations of the Cross – Joe Mireles Family
- Fourteenth Station of the Cross – Minnie López & Bertha Rivas
- Altar Cards – Mr. & Mrs. Isabel Serrano
- Holy Water Fonts – Mr. & Mrs. Philip Vásquez, and Mr. & Mrs. Joe Pacheco
- Missal Stand and Sacristy Cabinet – Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Arévalo
- Altar Cloths – Mary Banda, Anselma Rodríguez, Severo Cásarez, Carlota Ramírez, Vera Cruz
- Altar Boy Surplices – Frances Loera
- Missal – Edward Krekler [the designer of the church]

According to the event program, Charlie Uriegas, Richard Machuca, Lupe Jasso, and Jerónimo Estrada donated the labor for the church's plumbing. Ben López, Vincent Faro, Chester Bloomquist, Otho Jones, Pounds Tile Company, and Louis Snowden donated the church's tile. Agustín Garza, Arthur Caballero, Paul Treviño, Raymond Milicia, and Chavel Cermeno donated the necessary labor to set the tile.

According to the event program, other "*padrinos*" (donating "godparents") for the dedication ceremony included:

Rafael S. Abalo	Nino Román
Angelita Aldava	Contreras
G. G. Alvarado	Ben Cruz
Manuela Alvarado	Juan Cruz
Salome Álvarez	Leandro Cuevas
Steve Anguiano	Leonardo Cuevas
Antonio Arévalo	Lee DeLeón
Gregorio G.	José Faz
Balandrán	María C. Fernández
Lorenzo H. Balandrán	Nina Theresa
Cirilo Bonilla	Fernández
Edward Cantú	Luz Figueroa
Estevan Cantú	Esperanza Flores
Gregorio Cantú	Jesús Flores
María D. Carlín	Tony Freitag
José G. Carmona, Jr.	B. B. Garza & Son
Marie Cázares	Eugenia Gil
Evaristo Castruito	Narciso Gil
Mr. & Mrs. Tomás	Otis Gil
Cerda	Canuto Gonzales
Albina Chapa	Ángela R. González
Cleto Chapa	Benigno González
Isabel T. Chapa	Janie Guerrero
Nina Lupe Chapa	C. M. Hernández
Epiménia Contreras	Frank Hernández
	Frank C. Hernández

Albert Herrera	Dora Pulido
Tomasa Jaramillo	Fortino Pulido
Víctor Jaramillo	Rita Pulido
Mr. Kelly	Benito Quintero
John Ledesma	Matías Quintero
Johnny Ledesma	Atanacio Ramírez
Severa Leija	Gertrudes C. Ramírez
Gabriel Longoria	Mr. & Mrs. Inés
Julia S. López	Ramírez
Pedro López	Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence
Pete Lozano	Ramírez, Jr.
Agustín G. Martínez	María del Refugio
Nellie Martínez	Regalado
Nicolás Medrano	Francisco Rodríguez
Carlos Mendoza	Abundio Salinas
Consuelo P. Mendoza	Belia Sánchez
Demencio Mendoza	Francisco Sánchez
Gabino Moreno, Jr.	Frank G. Sánchez
Lily Mendoza	José Serrano
Louis Moreno	Niño Jesús Serrano
Paulita Mosqueda &	Paul Serrano
Husband	Julián Terán
Jesse Niño	Irineo Torres
Frances Palacios	Joe Treviño
Leonor Pérez	Josefa Trujillo
María S. Pérez	Manuel Vargas, Jr.
Nino Polo Pérez	Epifania Vásquez
Ophelia Pérez	Felicita Y. Vásquez
Pete Pérez	Mr. & Mrs. Phillip
Antonia Pescina	Vásquez
Mr. & Mrs. Elodio	Juana Villegas
Pescina	Napoleón Ybarbo
Atilano Pulido	Concha Ybarra

Parish Ministries in 1959

The same event program for the dedication of the church states that there were six active parish ministries in May 1959: the Holy Name Society [*Sociedad del Santo Nombre*], the Legion of Mary, the Altar and Rosary Society, the Children of Mary [*Hijas de María*], the N.C.C.W., and the *Josefitas*. There is no record of what the latter two groups may have been, though one presumes that the *Josefitas* was a group for young girls, and that the N.C.C.W. was a council of Catholic women. The event program contains a photo of the officers of these societies and a listing of all officers.

In May 1959, the officers of the Holy Name Society were Joe Pulido (President), Demencio Mendoza (Vice President), Narciso Gil (Secretary) and Inés Ramírez (Treasurer).

The officers of the Legion of Mary were Lee DeLeón (President), Ben Cruz (Vice President), Carlos Ruiz (Secretary), and Esteban Cantú (Treasurer).

The officers of the Altar and Rosary Society were María Banda (President), Virginia Tanguma (Vice President), Epifania Vásquez (Secretary), and Carlota Ramírez (Treasurer).

The officers of the Children of Mary were Lupe Sánchez (President), Naomi Pacheco (Vice President), Connie Méndez (Secretary), and Henrietta Escobedo (Treasurer).

The officers of the N.C.C.W. were Alice Villegas (President), Mary Louise Reyes (Vice President), Minnie López (Secretary), and Mary Louise Reyes (Treasurer).

The officers of the *Josefitas* were Gloria Cantú (President), Theresa Reyes (Vice President), and Victoria Castillo (Secretary/Treasurer).

The program also recognizes three parish baseball coaches: Joe Pulido, Sixto Ramírez and Pete Torres.

A Gilded Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Now that the church was built and dedicated, the family of José and María Mireles began thinking about what they might offer the church. Their son, Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles shares the story:

The church was built, and everyone promised to do something to help Father Goertz. That’s when my dad came up with the idea of donating *la Virgen de Guadalupe*

[the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe]. I spoke with Father Goertz. He liked the idea and thought it was wonderful. My dad and I went to Monterrey and ordered the picture, and we ordered the frame from a store in front of *El Roble* Church. We brought the framed picture back, and we needed a letter asking permission to pass the frame through the border. We showed it to Father Goertz, and he liked it. I asked someone to build a square [on the church wall], and I put up red drapes. The material was heavy and had to be nailed to the board. That was December 1959. I promised my dad I would decorate it that year and every year.

The photo below shows how Guadalupe Mireles decorated the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe one December.



Chapter Eight

Getting Involved at Cristo Rey: A Multiplication of Ministries

“People came from New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles
and South Bend [Indiana] to see what we were doing.”

Father Frank Briganti

“We didn’t get paid. We just did it for the love of God.”

Pedro “Pete” Torres

“The Baptists down the street had started a kindergarten....
[I said,] ‘By damn, they’re not going to take our people!’”

Father Frank Briganti

“The Cristo Rey story was special
because of the people of the parish,
the priests I worked with, and, of course,
the fact that Sandi had put together a school.”

Father Everett Trebtoske

The *Cursillo* Movement Comes to Cristo Rey

Father Goertz recalls a late-night conversation that he had with Father Frank Briganti in 1959. According to Father Goertz, Father Briganti asked, “What the hell is going on in Waco? There’s a program up there, and they’re secretive about it.” Through the efforts of Franciscan Father Gabriel Fernández, a movement called *Cursillo de Cristiandad* had come to the United States offering a “small course” (or *cursillo*, in Spanish) in Christianity for lay people. Not yet knowing this, Father Goertz suggested to his associate pastor: “Frank, why don’t you go check it out and make an assessment?” Accompanied by various young men from the parish, Father Briganti attended a *Cursillo* retreat in Waco from April 30 through May 3, 1959. It was

apparently a fine experience, since, within a month, he had convinced his pastor to do the same.

Father Briganti well recalls his acquaintance with Father Fernández in Waco. "He was a fabulous public speaker and a crazy guy," Father Briganti says. "He gave the *Cursillo*, and he was Mister *Cursillo*." Noting that Father Fernández never learned the English language, Father Briganti shares, "He came to me for confession, and the only language we had in common was Latin. He could have killed the pope, and I wouldn't have known it!"

Father Goertz recalls his own role in opening doors for the *Cursillo* movement in the U.S. "Once I had made [the retreat], I spoke with Bishop Reicher. I said, 'The *Cursillo* movement is eager to visit other dioceses [in the U.S.]. It would be great if you could give them a letter of approval.'" The bishop agreed, and Father Goertz crafted the letter of approbation. Recalling a recent trip to the diocesan archives to inspect the letter, Father Goertz says, "I wrote the letter. [Bishop Reicher] didn't know anything about *Cursillo*. And [the leaders of the *Cursillo* movement] went and spread it around the country."

Father Briganti recalls that Cristo Rey soon became the national center of the *Cursillo* movement. Cardinal Spellman from the Archdiocese of New York sent a bishop to Austin to experience the retreat. A bishop from North Dakota flew Father Briganti there to speak about the movement. Father Briganti shares, "People came from New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and South Bend [Indiana] to see what we were doing."

Much of this attention was no doubt due to Father Briganti's presence in the parish. He says, "It was apparent that we needed a [*Cursillo*] manual in English. I published the first booklet on *Cursillo* in English, which made me well-known around the country." He recalls paying a local printer to publish the manual, only to later discover that the printer would go bankrupt without publishing it. Fortunately, a Franciscan priest in San Angelo came to the rescue. Father Briganti recalls, "He bailed us out with this booklet and helped us get the *Cursillo* movement started in English."

Though the *Cursillo* movement had been brought to Waco, Austin was now the veritable center of its activity. "We were creating visibility [for *Cursillo*]," Father Briganti says. "I was here [in Austin], publishing and speaking on *Cursillo*. [Father] Fred Underwood [of the

Congregation of Holy Cross] was active in it. And the Oblates [of Mary Immaculate, at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church] were into it up to their armpits!"

Father Briganti also speaks of the new life that the *Cursillo* movement brought to Cristo Rey. "It was a 'game-changer' for the parish," he says. "It got the men in." Father Goertz also recalls "the eagerness, the vitality, the awakening on the part of the men, and then of the women. Over 90 men [from the parish] participated in it. There was a lot of excitement, and it had a tremendous impact on the parish early on." The Spanish retreat movement, he says, was instrumental in reaching out to men in the parish who otherwise might not have been involved.

Sixto and Irene (Sánchez) Ramírez recall being active in the *Cursillo* movement, as do Pedro "Pete" and Frances (Mozqueda) Torres. Irene and Frances can identify many of the faces in a 1961 photo (below) of the first women from Cristo Rey to attend a *Cursillo*: Justa Cancino (kneeling, front row left), Esther Ortiz (4th woman seated on ground), Lupe Pulido (5th woman seated on ground), Fannie Estrada (7th woman seated on a chair), Frances Torres (2nd woman standing), Patsy Mendoza (12th woman standing), Sara Celedón (18th woman standing), Nelly Tellez (23rd woman standing), Phyllis Cantú (25th woman standing), Dora Pulido (3rd woman, back row), Cruz Pulido (4th woman, back row), Irene Ramírez (5th woman, back row), Lois Villaseñor (7th woman, back row), Celsa Acosta (10th woman, back row) and Felice Arocha (14th woman, back row). Smiling in the center of the photo is Father Gabriel Fernández, the priest who brought the movement to the U.S. To the left of him is Arnulfo Aguirre, and to the right of him are Joe Pulido and Pete Torres. Sixto Ramírez is the young man seated on the ground.



1961 women's *Cursillo*.

Sixto shares, “Father Briganti was our spiritual advisor. Irene and I are the first couple he married.” A mother of five, Irene says, “We’re all *Cursillistas*. I didn’t participate [as regularly] because I had too many children.” A mother of eight, Frances concurs: “Same here.” Their husbands, however, became extremely active in the movement. Sixto provides an extended reflection on his involvement:

Pete and I became *profesores*, lecturers. We learned the *rollos* [spiritual reflections] and talked in front of new *Cursillistas*. We were the first *Cursillistas* from Cristo Rey. Most of us went to *Cursillo* #15 in Waco. That was the first *Cursillo* for Cristo Rey. *Cursillo* was a “rude awakening” for some of us “lukewarm” Catholics. It was an intense three days, from Thursday through Sunday. Psychologically, it was put together to take you on this “trip,” so that by Sunday even the “hard core” people who wouldn’t come around came around. We had tremendous experiences. We were involved for three years. We’d go to San Angelo and Amarillo and to a little bitty country church.

Pedro adds, “Everything was done with no money. We didn’t get paid. We just did it for the love of God.” Sixto adds that his involvement in the *Cursillo* movement ultimately propelled him to open St. Dismas House, which he describes as “a halfway house for convicts.” Sixto says that the name for the facility, which he directed on East First Street for 25 years, came from a catechetical lesson he received at Cristo Rey. “I was six years old when the Sister at Cristo Rey told [my class] that Saint Dismas was a good thief who ‘stole’ heaven! I went home thinking, ‘He must have been a really good thief because he stole heaven!’”



1961 Men's Cursillo.

Ventures into Journalism

Father Frank Briganti recalls one afternoon in which a man came to the rectory. He shares that the man “put a pile of money on my desk and said, ‘This is my contribution to the *jamaica*.’” Father Briganti would learn that the man was Dale Francis, a former lay missionary to Cuba who now served as the editor of the *Lone Star Catholic*, the Austin Diocese’s newspaper (1957-1961). As a result of their relationship, Father Briganti began to write for the newspaper. He shares, “It was at that time that my writing took off!”

After his experience with the *Cursillo* movement, Father Briganti would begin to edit and publish his own journal, *Ultreya*. He remembers the humble beginnings of the publication that is now a nationally-renowned magazine:

Father Gabriel Fernández came down [to Austin] on the day of an altar server picnic at Bastrop. Out of that meeting, *Ultreya* was born. I would become the editor and take care of all details of production and raising money for it. I was the publisher and editor. A couple of Immaculata Sisters from Holy Cross Hospital helped with the editing, and the translating and mailing was done by men in the parish.

After two or three years of publication, Father Briganti recalls selling *Ultreya* to the Claretians, an order of Roman Catholic priests and brothers, for \$500. He left the money on his dresser in the parish rectory where, due to the high amount of traffic in the rectory, it was stolen.

Father Briganti is also proud of a newspaper, *The Bomb*, which he helped local teens to publish one summer. He recalls enlisting the services of a teacher from Johnston High School to help with the project. To pique interest in the project, announcements were printed which read, "Come and Throw the Bomb!" Father Briganti says, "We were just looking for something to keep kids occupied. We probably published only one edition of *The Bomb*, but I'd like to think that it kept 20 to 30 kids off the streets."

Outreach to Teenagers

Father Briganti recalls the challenge of providing formation for the high school youths of the parish in the 1950s. "We had a dickens of a time," he says. "The nuns [the Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco] took care of [grades] one through eight, but high school was an issue." As a result, Father Briganti began to bring together parishioners who might be interested in such a ministry. He recalls recruiting a woman who lived on East First Street, as well as a local attorney who had recently graduated from law school and had opened his practice in the neighborhood. "I would meet with them once a week," he shares, "but it was very poor formation for them." For one year, they ordered copies of *High Time*, a weekly leaflet that they shared with the high school students of the parish. Father Briganti then canceled the subscription because, as he says,

I got angry at them. [*High Time*] never used Hispanics in their photos! So we dropped the subscription and went to a textbook, which was less ephemeral than the weekly handouts. Looking back on it, though, [our curriculum] was really "hit or miss"!

Various efforts were also made to reach out to young people through sports and scouting. Father Briganti recalls the parish's basketball team, which enjoyed considerable successes. He says, "We wanted stiffer competition, so we signed them up to play a team in San Antonio. [The members of the other team] were two years older, and we won!" Photos also exist of various softball teams during those years.



Father Frank Briganti with the Cristo Rey girls' softball team playing in Red Rock in July 1956. To his left are Hortencia Espinoza and Virginia Garza, and to his right are Inez and Dorothy Portillo. Elizabeth Martínez is the second girl kneeling from the left.

Father Briganti also remembers the parish's Boy Scout troop in the late 1950s. He approached a Mr. González, who lived on the north side of the 2100 block of East Second Street, and asked him to begin a Boy Scout troop in the parish as "something for the boys to do." Mr.

González secured the necessary uniforms and manuals, and served as the troop's first scoutmaster. The boys met in the old barracks, on the site of the present-day church. Father Briganti shares, "I remember going in [to their meetings] to pin medals on [the boys' uniforms]. The 'top dogs' of scouting came in and gave talks and patted the boys on the back." Louis Cuevas recalls being part of this Boy Scout troop for two years. He says that the scoutmasters of Troop #26 at that time were Frank Ramírez and Manuel Martínez. Some memory exists of John Pineda also helping to lead the troop. Louis remembers that the troop spent weekends at Emma Long Park and Camp Tom Wooten on Lake Austin "building campfires, tying knots and earning merit badges." As a troop, they also helped to disassemble the parish's *jamaica* booths at the Pan-American Park. Other members of the troop at that time, he says, were Rudy Espinoza, Bobby Gómez, Domingo Lugo, Roy Ramírez, Buddy Ruiz, Joe Treviño, Philip Vásquez, John Vera and Mike Vera.

It was around this time that the priests at Cristo Rey partnered with the theological faculty at St. Edward's University. Father Briganti recalls,

During our first year [at Cristo Rey], we [the priests] had time to sit around and chat and watch TV. The second year, the 'sky fell in.' When the new church went up, things really started getting busy. We were panting and looking for something for the kids [to do]!

As a result, they invited the Dominicans from the theology department of St. Edward's University to provide a weekly Children's Mass for the parish. Father Briganti continues, "Father George Welch and another priest took over the Children's Mass for a couple of years, and they did a marvelous job. Other St. Edward's students started coming over, too, and eating with us." Father Briganti recalls that one such student, Joe Juárez, would later serve as president of a university in South Texas. Another student kept needling Father Briganti about the need for a community credit union, an idea that would later result in the birth of the Cristo Rey Catholic Credit Union.

Father Briganti recalls that the parish's relationship with the faculty at St. Edward's University was largely amicable. The faculty

members would come to the parish to celebrate the Children's Mass. They would also invite the priests of Cristo Rey to various university events, including the annual baccalaureate Mass. Only on one occasion was their relationship more strained. Father Briganti recalls that he was invited to give a public lecture at St. Edward's University on why it is that university types are not more interested in social action. He titled his talk, "Deadhead Egg Heads." Father Briganti laughs, "The faculty showed up with hatchets under their cassocks!"

A New Kindergarten Program

Before the new church was being built, Father Briganti had worked to establish the parish's first kindergarten program. He remembers, "The Baptists down the street had started a kindergarten, and I was very competitive with other religions back then. [I said,] 'By damn, they're not going to take our people!'" Father Briganti invited Elizabeth Martínez to transform the barracks beside the mission church into a space in which young children could learn. He says,

Liz was very vivacious and intelligent. She agreed to [direct the program]. She had no training whatsoever. We bought her some jump ropes and blocks. The goal was to keep kids there for half a day, to educate them, and maybe to mention God a time or two.



The kindergarten graduation of Helen (Mendoza) Morales, c. 1964.

The Birth of the Weekly Sunday Breakfast

Now that the new church was completed, the old mission church (presently located at 2215 East Second Street) was transformed into a religious education center. It was around this time that the parish acquired the property at 2208 East Second Street, across from the old mission church. Another barrack was brought to that property to accommodate an expanded religious education program.

Now that the old mission church was not used as a worship space, Father Goertz had an idea of how he might turn that space into a place

where people could congregate after Sunday Mass. His idea was to host a weekly Sunday breakfast in that space. Father Goertz doesn't recall any other parish in the area offering a weekly Sunday breakfast at the time, so he believes the concept was birthed at Cristo Rey. He discussed the idea with the women of the Altar and Rosary Society, and they took up the challenge of organizing the parish's first Sunday breakfasts. The previous storeroom of the mission church was remodeled to be a kitchen, and breakfast was served in what was previously the sacristy and sanctuary of the church.

Dolores "Dottie" Chapa remembers that her mother, Felice (Gonzales) Arocha, walked the neighborhood streets with Father Goertz, soliciting volunteers to assist with the parish's first breakfasts. From that effort came such key volunteers in future years as Micaela (Acosta) Cantú, Ms. Cantú, Florentina Chapa, Ms. Faz, Ynosencia Herrera, Dominga Hurtado, Ms. Pulido and Ms. Vásquez. Amelia (Vallejo) Pérez also remembers Felice asking her to get involved in the church. She remembers, "I asked [Felice], 'What will we do?' And she said, 'We just go to meetings, then we work in the kitchen.'"

Amelia would become one of the many hardworking women that made the weekly breakfast a success. Amelia learned to cook from her mother and grandmother, and for 16 years she owned and operated AC Foods, a restaurant at 908 East First Street. She shared her knowledge of cooking with several women at the Cristo Rey kitchen and in the meantime helped to raise some \$200 per week for the parish. She remembers that Vera Cruz was in charge of bringing the groceries, and that for some years the Riojas girls served as waitresses.

Juanita (Rodríguez) Sánchez remembers when she began assisting Dominga Hurtado with her breakfast group. Soon she found herself helping all breakfast groups every week. She says, "I didn't have any place to go, so I would go to church and help out." After some time of being mentored by Dominga, Juanita proudly recalls that one day Dominga announced to her, "Now you're going to have your own breakfast group!" Juanita remembers that a large number of people volunteered to assist her breakfast group, sometimes even causing other breakfast group leaders to be envious.

From the mid-1960s until 1995, Petra "Patsy" (Estrada) Gonzales served as the head cashier for the weekly Sunday breakfast. Many remember her at the cash register, with her children playing in a

basket on the floor beside her. “She was the cashier for all the groups,” Juanita says. “She was always there. She never missed a Sunday.” Petra explains, “Nobody wanted to do it. They couldn’t count. I had a baby every year, so I’d have a baby, and the following Sunday, I would be there [as cashier]!” In the meantime, her husband, Jack Gonzales, was working in the kitchen.

Mariana (Piscina) Rivas also remembers helping to prepare the Sunday breakfast once a month for nearly 20 years. She says that she would often cook 30 pounds of rice for church events, so she was known by all as *la comadre del arroz* [the donating “godmother” for the rice].

The Catholic Lay Mission Corps Comes to Cristo Rey

Father Goertz recalls a conversation he had in 1962 with Holy Cross Father Fred Underwood. Father Underwood had created the Catholic Lay Mission Corps, a service organization in which college graduates would share their time and talent with Hispanic parishes in the southwestern United States, in return for a very small stipend. Father Goertz recalls Father Underwood’s invitation: “Could I have one [of the members of the Catholic Lay Mission Corps] in the parish, [so that s/he could] get a feel for the Hispanic culture?”

Shortly thereafter, Father Goertz welcomed the first two members of the Catholic Lay Mission Corps to Cristo Rey. Because the Little Workers of the Lord, Oblates of the Church were no longer living at the parish’s facility at 2201 East 2½ Street, the property now became the new residence for the Catholic Lay Mission Corps. Several missionaries would cycle through the residence during the subsequent years, with as many as eight missionaries residing there at one time.

Father Briganti shares, “We lucked out getting them. They were all women. They were deeply committed. And we established many deep and lasting friendships.” He says that some missionaries taught catechesis at Cristo Rey and neighboring Dolores Catholic Church. Another missionary worked at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Hospital, near St. Edward’s University.

The first two missionaries were perhaps the best known to the parish. Judy Nelson, a native of Chicago, would serve as the parish’s first full-time secretary. Father Briganti shares, “[Having her] was a blessing. [As priests, we] didn’t have to answer the phone every five

minutes!" Another missionary, Sandi Yonikus, served as director of the parish's religious education programs. Father Briganti describes Sandi as "very talented and creative, a tremendous musician; faith ran deep in her life." He says she was the niece of Father Dismas Clark, the "hoodlum priest" in Saint Louis, Missouri.

In his autobiography, *Joyful Journey*, Father Trebtocke remembers these first two missionaries. He also recalls their meager living conditions:

[They received] fifty dollars a month, and maybe room and board....There was a house across the street from the church where two people, working as part of the Catholic Lay Mission Corps, lived. One was a secretary, and one was a teacher whose name was Sandi Yonikus. She came to Cristo Rey driving a brand new Impala convertible, and in a half-year's time, she had to sell it because she couldn't keep up the payments and the servicing of the car [on the stipend the Catholic Lay Mission Corps provided her]. So she no longer had a car, and [she] lived in a simple house across the street from the church.

In an interview in his home in Wimberley, Father Trebtocke recalled Sandi's story:

Sandi was already there [at Cristo Rey] when I came. She had graduated from the University of Illinois and was an outstanding teacher in Illinois, then in California. A priest in California talked to her about the Catholic Lay Mission Corps. The Holy Cross priests put it together. She came to St. Edward's University, perhaps for indoctrination, then she was going to be assigned to a Spanish-speaking parish in Texas, New Mexico or Arizona. They assigned her to Cristo Rey. She didn't know Spanish either, but she taught children who were bilingual. She put together a program that was so outstanding that it got the attention of Liturgical Press. There were three public schools in the parish. The students would come [to the liturgical center] after school. Sometimes there would be 40, 50 or even 60 kids lined up, waiting to come in and get involved in

different activities. She was an ideal teacher and eventually became one of the top catechists in the country.

Father Briganti, who was asked to join the Mission Corps' board, recalls a number of other Catholic Lay Mission Corps members who lived at Cristo Rey, including Janet Johnson, Gerene Matheson, Joan Penzenstadler, June Titus, Angie Zercaro and two other young ladies named Jane and Mardie. He recalls the faces of at least three other missionaries, whose names escape him nearly fifty years later. Apart from Judy Nelson and Sandi Yonikus, all these women, he says, came to Cristo Rey for training, then moved on to other mission sites.

A Difficult Winter for the Priests of Cristo Rey

Father Goertz recalls that in November 1963, Father Briganti was feeling worn out and went to spend one week with his family in Pennsylvania. When Father Briganti called to check in, Father Goertz confessed, "Whatever hit you is hitting me." It was during that month that Father Goertz discovered that he had colon cancer. Because he was on the board of Holy Cross Hospital, he scheduled the surgery there for December 5. Before heading to the hospital, he recalls telling Father Briganti, "Frank, I may be gone for months. You're in charge. Whatever you decide to do, do it."

To this day, Father Goertz laughs when he recalls Father Briganti's actions in his absence. Referring to the structure that occupied the site of the present-day parish center, he shares, "[Father Briganti] raffled off the barrack!" Father Goertz says that the barracks was won by the parish's secretary, Agustina "Tina" Gómez, who moved the building to the place where it remains today. When Father Briganti hears the story of his having raffled off the barracks, he laughs. "That's not accurate," he says. "If I was involved in it, I surely ought to remember that!" His eye light up as he adds, "There were many things I wanted to do, but [Father Goertz] wasn't sick enough!"

Father Briganti, does, for instance, recall remodeling the parish's rectory in Father Goertz's absence. He explains that the front door of the western half of the U-shaped building on the northwest corner of Canadian and East Second Streets opened into the priests' living room. "Since people came [to the rectory] 24/7, we couldn't have any privacy in our own living room," he says. He built various walls into

the rectory to partition off various small office spaces. He also clarifies that he does not remember the parish having a secretary at that time.

Father Everett Trebtoske is Assigned to Cristo Rey

Shortly after his surgery, Father Goertz remembers calling Father Edward Matocha, chancellor of the diocese, from the hospital. Father Goertz said, "Ed, Briganti needs another priest with him." Noting that the bishop was participating in the Second Vatican Council in Rome, Father Matocha replied, "Let's talk when the bishop gets back." "No, call him in Rome," Father Goertz retorted, "[Father Briganti] needs someone now." Father Matocha asked Father Goertz which priest he wanted at the parish with Father Briganti. Without hesitating, Father Goertz replied, "I want Trebtoske."

Father Briganti puts another spin on the story. He recalls,

I was responsible for having 'Treb' come to Cristo Rey. In my mind, he was among the "dedicated." When Goertz had cancer and I had to handle this shtick [ministry at Cristo Rey] myself, Matocha called and asked who I wanted.

He says that Father Trebtoske had a deep sense of art and music and of encountering God in beauty.

After Father Goertz was released from the hospital in February 1964, he spent a month recuperating with his brother, Father Aloys Goertz, in Victoria, Texas. He recalls returning to Cristo Rey. Father Patrick Flores, the future Archbishop of San Antonio, was in the old mission church, presenting the annual Lenten mission for women. When Father Goertz entered the west door of the old mission church, the women saw him and ran to embrace him. As Father Goertz recalls, Father Flores called out from the pulpit: "Ladies, he just had surgery! Don't crush him! Don't kill him!"

After his surgery, Father Goertz never returned to his duties at the diocesan chancery. He recalls later telling the bishop, "Bishop Reicher, forgive me. I casually didn't come back [to the chancery]." Father Edward Jordan assumed Father Goertz's responsibilities there, and Father Goertz would dedicate his remaining years of ministry at Cristo Rey solely to the parish community.

The Arrival of Father Trebtoske

Knowing no Spanish, Father Everett J. Trebtoske recalls his surprise at being assigned to a Spanish-speaking parish. In his autobiography, *Joyful Journey*, he shares,

I was assigned to Cristo Rey Church in Austin, Texas. And [I was] kind of surprised because Cristo Rey...is predominantly a Spanish-speaking community. ...Most of the people, yes, a vast majority of them, ...had come from Mexico—maybe not all first-generation [immigrants], maybe some [were] second-generation.

Because many parishioners were bilingual, Father Trebtoske did not feel limited by his inability to speak Spanish. In his autobiography, he shares,

I settled in at Cristo Rey, a poor parish, a very poor parish. [It] needed all kinds of help, you know. It needed a priest to fill in as best as he could for Father Goertz. But at that time—this was 1963 to 1964—most of the people in that area, most of the people at Cristo Rey spoke both English and Spanish, and so it wasn't a drawback [for me] not to be able to speak Spanish. They understood.

In an interview at his home in Wimberley, Father Trebtoske speculated that it was likely only the older generation of the parish that didn't understand a great deal of English. He confessed,

I don't speak any Spanish. Father Briganti spoke some, and Father Goertz was fluent. At that time, many people [in the parish] were Spanish-speaking, but they had been [in the U.S.] long enough to speak English—except the old-timers; they probably didn't understand my homilies.

The Departure of Father Briganti and the Arrival of Father Dokupil

News of Father Briganti's departure from Cristo Rey came as a shock. Noting that May 1 is the day on which the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker, and the day on which many nations celebrate their labor or workers' day, he shares the following story:

I was asked to give a homily or address at Saint Edward's University, for their May Day celebration. Instead of putting emphasis on Mary, I put emphasis on Saint Joseph and workers and how the Diocese [of Austin] doesn't pay its employees just wages. I was transferred [from Cristo Rey] within ten days!

Father Briganti was assigned to minister to the Catholic community at the maximum security prison in Gatesville. He says, "[Bishop Reicher] sent me to the prison, and they literally had to talk me into it. I literally threw up."

With Father Briganti's departure from Cristo Rey in May 1964, the newly-ordained Father Edward J. Dokupil was assigned to assist as associate pastor of the parish community. A parish history compiled in 1972 speaks of the parish's two associate pastors at that time:

Father Trebtoske's interest in the liturgy and education were evident by many improvements at the school and the formation of the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center. Father Dokupil's rapport with the youth of the community was followed by the formation of numerous programs to meet the religious, social, cultural, and athletic needs of the young people of Cristo Rey.



The old Cristo Rey Catholic Church, now transformed into the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center, 1964.

Dolores “Dottie” Chapa recalls: “My mother named my son, Edward Everett Chapa, after Father Edward Dokupil and Father Everett Trebtoske.”

Father Goertz recalls the contrast created by the addition of Father Dokupil’s personality to the parish staff: “[Father] Everett is a real free spirit, and I’m not that organized. But [Father] Dokupil was. [Father Everett and I] were so free-spirited, [that] I’m sure [Father Dokupil] thought, ‘Why don’t they tell me what to do!’”

The three priests enjoyed many moments of community during those years. Father Goertz recalls one Christmas Eve when Father Trebtoske suggested that they enjoy “an exquisite bottle of wine” together. “After the midnight Mass, and after the *tamales* and chocolate in the parish center,” Father Goertz recalls, “we sipped wine around the woodburning stove in the back room of the rectory.” The next day, when he returned to the rectory after celebrating the early morning Mass, he remembers the young priests asking him to speak more softly since, as Father Trebtoske put it, “I have an exquisite headache!”

The Cristo Rey Liturgical Center

Because of Sandi Yonikus’ teaching ability, a new and innovative program was soon to be birthed in the old mission church of Cristo Rey. As the parish history compiled in 1972 relates,

Knowledge alone didn’t communicate a living faith. In the summer of 1964, it was decided to begin from a new perspective. The priests and parishioners combined talents and began preparing an environment in which the young people could transform knowledge into living faith. Father Trebtoske, associate pastor at this time, with the assistance of Sandi Yonikus, directed teams of carpenters, painters, plumbers and seamstresses, and together they began a transformation of the old wooden church.

In his autobiography, Father Trebtoske shares,

[Sandi] had great ideas. She knew what the school needed. She said that it would be good if we had about 20 or 30 little tables with little benches... In one of the rooms, where we

taught the liturgy, we needed an altar. We needed a sanctuary with vestments, so that the children could put on vestments and go through offering the Mass. We needed a place to teach the sacraments and baptism. So...after we had one of [our] meetings, Father Goertz said to me, "Father, did you hear all these things that Sandi was talking about?" I said, "yes." He said, "O.K., you're in charge." So I had to muster the craftsmen of the parish to make the tables... [and] the little benches, to make the altar and the Hillside Room. The Hillside Room was just an empty room, but [Sandi] wanted a hillside, because Jesus taught people sitting on the hillside. And so a man came in and built stairs where the people could sit down. It was a 'Hillside Room.' Half the room was a stairs where you just walked in and sat down on the hillside. And on those days, that hillside was packed with children.

Tony Martínez has a quite different memory of carpet-covered bleachers of the "Hillside Room." He shares,

We went to catechism [classes] in the barrack, and there was a brand new carpet on the bleachers. The carpet was so pretty, [I thought] it can't be meant to be walked on. So I crawled up it on my knees. And I remember the whole class laughing at me. I didn't know better: We didn't have carpet [at home]!

Tony also remembers how Sandi used to play the guitar and lead the children in song. He also recalls that the décor of the liturgical center was "very 60s: with flowers and stuff."

Father Goertz recalls speaking with the children on the days in which he was assigned to assist the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center. "We greeted each child when they came in," he says, "and we would tell them, 'You are special.'" When all the first-graders were finally assembled in the Hillside Room, Father Goertz would address them for some ten minutes before they "spilled out" into the other rooms.

Father Trebtoske recalls Sandi's great talent in decorating the old mission church. He relates,

[Sandi] decorated that whole barrack. There were maybe three or four rooms. The Hillside Room was the biggest. And then there was the liturgical [room], with the altar and the vestments and a baptismal font. There was a mosaic that she had put together. It was very attractive...and was part of the liturgy room....Everything [Sandi] did was incredibly magnificent.

Father Goertz also recalls a “Montessori Room,” in which the children interacted with various materials. He notes, “We may not have given them a lot of theology, but we did give them an experience. It was creative, and, if nothing else, kids had a good experience, and it was rooted in who we are as Catholics. There was also a great deal of focus on the celebration of the Eucharist.”

Father Trebtoske remembers the way in which the three priests of the parish worked together with Sandi to create the lessons presented by the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center. In a recent interview, he shared,

We three priests [Fr. Goertz, Fr. Dokupil and I] would get together with Sandi on Saturday mornings, to talk about the lesson for the week ahead. Sandi would then write the lesson on Saturday and Sunday, and that was the lesson that the priest would give on his assigned day. One priest would take the first- and second-graders. Another would take the third- and fourth-graders. Another would take the fifth- and sixth- graders, and so on.

Likewise, Father Goertz remembers, “We, priests, participated [in the program]. We’d meet each week to review what was going on in religious education. I’d come back from the chancery [on weekday afternoons], and one or two days each week, I’d be teaching!” This tradition continued for some years, and Associate Pastor Father Charles Campise (1967-1969) would later say, “[Father] Goertz, [Father] Davis, [Sandi] Yonikus and I used to meet to create the lesson plans for the coming week, so that we’d have a consistent message for the children that week.”

The parish history compiled in 1972 contains a description of the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center by Sandi Yonikus. She writes,

When a child enters the liturgical center for a weekly class, [s/he] is individually greeted by the teachers and priest with a handshake and a personal word of welcome. The priest and teachers try to create an atmosphere of quiet and reverence, by their approach to the children. The group lessons are directive, with a carefully-prepared sequence and vocabulary. Drama, demonstration, visual and audio materials are utilized to aid comprehension. Children especially enjoy the period of singing which follows the lesson... When the lesson and singing [are] over, the children enter the Activities Room and Liturgy Room. It is during this period of 'freedom' after the lesson that learning to 'live the faith' begins to develop. The children may choose to read, work with liturgically-oriented games, express themselves in art, music or drama, practice housekeeping duties, or learn the significance and beauty of liturgy. During this period, the children are interacting with others. They have actual opportunities to develop and practice the Christian virtues. As the children work, the teachers and priest make themselves available, should a child request or require aid.

According to descriptions of the program, the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center was apparently popular with children. In her 1972 description of the program, Sandi Yonikus writes,

Any time after the lesson, the children are free to go home. Few do. The same lesson is given every day of the week, to each of six age groups. Some children come several days for the same lesson, if they especially like it....The total time spent at the liturgical center per child per week is usually two hours....The liturgical center, then, is a place where priest and teachers reinforce parents in their task of rearing their children as Christians.

Monthly meetings were also hosted for parents, "in order to keep the faith of the adults alive, healthy and growing."

Father Trebtoske fondly remembers the creativity that Sandi employed in teaching about the Catholic faith. In his autobiography, he writes,

Sandi was very knowledgeable and very smart, and [she] knew how she could best reach children. A lot of her work was very artistic. I remember when she wanted to teach the story of creation [in Genesis 1-2]. We went to a mattress factory and bought some boxes, ...and she cut out [designs in] the front part of these boxes....She put together three or four of these mattress boxes, with different kinds of tissue paper, [and] with lighting inside. And so, in the story of creation, ...there was thunder and lightning and light inside the mattress boxes, and it was stunning. [And when God said,] 'Let there be birds and everything in the sky,' ...she had this mattress box with the front part cut out with different colored tissue paper.... So when we talked about birds, she had birds [lit up], and the birds looked like they were flying. And [Sandi] did a lot of things like that.

Sandi Yonikus attracted much attention to the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center. Father Trebtoske shares that persons from throughout the diocese came to see how the faith was being taught to children in new and creative ways. Sandi and the priests were also called to share their model of religious education through the nation. With a sparkle in his eye, Father Trebtoske recounts,

It was exciting. Monsignor Goertz, Sandi Yonikus and I put that [liturgical center] together. Sandi was so outstanding that they had her giving conferences. They would pay her, and she would use that money to fly us to New Orleans or Minneapolis with her. Once there was a national liturgical conference in Houston. We took the second-graders, who were preparing for their First Communion. We chartered a greyhound, and we had adult sponsors. And the kids put on a demonstration [at the conference]. It was exciting, and Cristo Rey got a lot of attention.

Apparently, the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center also enjoyed some international renown. In his autobiography, Father Trebtoske shares the following anecdote:

Cardinal [Leon-Joseph] Suenens came from Belgium to give some talks to Tshe University of Texas....After the

cardinal's talks, Bishop Reicher wanted to show him something about what was happening in Texas. He brought the cardinal from The University of Texas to Cristo Rey, to see what Sandi was doing. Cardinal Suenens said, 'Where does one find a Sandi Yonikus?' ...He was astounded at what was happening there at Cristo Rey. The Cristo Rey story and Sandi and the things that were happening [at the liturgical center] got the attention of some of the parishes around the diocese, and from time to time, they would charter a bus and bring all their teachers to see what Sandi was doing.

Father Goertz concludes, "[Father Trebtoske] and Sandi Yonikus were a great team for religious education. At the height of the program, they had 900 children, in grades one to six, coming from the local schools each week." Father Trebtoske and Sandi were also on the cutting edge of implementing the changes of the Second Vatican Council, which sometimes caused tension with the community. One parishioner, for instance, recalls that Sandi discontinued such traditions as girls wearing white dresses and having *padrinos* (godparents) for First Communion.

The Go-Go Series

During the same years that Father Trebtoske was working with Sandi Yonikus to birth the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center, associate pastor Father Edward Dokupil was invigorating the parish's ministry to youths and young adults. Beginning in 1964, he brought together a leadership team of 11 teenagers to breathe new life into the parish's Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). As the 1972 parish history relates,

Through careful planning and creative leadership, the organization grew and thrived. [The young people] liked it because it was not a "religion course." The members began asking about faith, morals and teenage problems. Little by little, teenagers began to open up. Discussions became lively. There were so many things they wanted to know.

Two years later, in October of 1966, the “Go-Go Series” began as an “experimental” Christian formation series for high school youth on Sunday evenings. As the parish history compiled in 1972 relates,

Fathers Goertz, Trebtoske, Dokupil, and Miss Sandi Yonikus combined efforts to work out the Go-Go Series....A month in advance, a poster campaign was launched, with registrations taken from a Go-Go booth after Masses on Sunday. Go-Go was advertised as “hootenanny, speakers, cokes and discussion.” The speakers were new names with “new” topics. The word got around to the local junior and senior high schools. Teenagers from Cristo Rey began signing up their friends from other parishes. A Go-To Tram was especially designed and built to provide transportation to and from Go-Go, within the boundaries of the parish.

Father Trebtoske recalls the “Go-To Tram” (pictured below). He recently related,

We had religious education every day of the week....On Sunday nights, we had a program for the high school kids. Someone in the parish built a trailer with seats on each side, and a man would travel through the parish and bring the kids to the program on Sunday nights. It was like a big float: painted and with a roof. We would ring a bell, and the high school kids would sit on it and come to the church on it.

Father Goertz also joked, “I don’t think [the young people] came for religion. They came for a ride on the cart!” During the holiday season, the youth choir caroled from the “Go-To Tram.”

The parish history written in 1972 continues,

When Go-Go opened, a little over 100 teenagers showed up, mostly out of curiosity. Father E.J. Farge of Houston gave Go-Go a smashing initiation with



The Go-To Tram.

his talk on the teenager as a person. In subsequent weeks, carefully-chosen speakers continued to thrill the young people with pertinent topics and genuine straightforwardness.

Father Trebtoske remembers, “For [program] speakers, Sandi used to recruit outstanding priests, teachers and liturgists from the Diocese of Houston.”

According to the parish history written in 1972, each session of the Go-Go Series opened with singing led by the Go-Go singers. This group was comprised of Judy Esparza, Robert Mendoza, Mary Ester Morris, Stella Pérez, Olga Pineda and Ann Soliz. According to the same history, the planning board of the Go-Go Series consisted of the following of middle and high school students:

- Alice Acosta
- Ernest Maldonado
- Rosemary Quiroz
- Ralph Calvo
- Robert Mendoza
- Genaro Robles
- Adella Galván
- Mary Ester Morris
- Hermán Rosales
- Danny Gómez
- Edward Palacios
- Janie Ruiz
- James Gómez
- Olga Pineda
- Ann Soliz
- David Gonzales
- Jesse Portillo
- Mary Ann Villegas
- Josie Limón
- Mary Portillo

During its first year, some 480 teenagers attended one or more sessions of the Go-Go Series. More than 260 teenagers attended a “Folk Mass” in the parish center to mark the end of the first year. The Go-Go Series recommenced the following year. No one can presently attest to whether the program lasted more than two years.

A Growing Community

During his three years at Cristo Rey, Father Trebtoske was greatly impacted by the number of baptisms at the parish. In his autobiography, he recalls,

I fell in love with Cristo Rey and had many baptisms at Cristo Rey. When I first got there, Cristo Rey was not air-conditioned, and I can remember baptizing children on a Sunday afternoon: sometimes 10, 15, 20 children in a church not air-conditioned. But it was always a thrill.

Father Frank Briganti also recalls the many baptisms at the parish. He shares,

Baptisms [at Cristo Rey] were always entertaining. They were supposed to be at 2:00 p.m. on Sundays. The people would arrive at 2:30 or 3:00, and you couldn't turn them away. There would be no less than five children. We offered no instruction ahead of time; the instruction came in the prayer. It was "wholesale baptism"!

The Priest with the Mercedes Benz

Father Trebtoske also recalls how he impressed the ladies of the parish with a Mercedes Benz that the bishop of Corpus Christi had convinced him to buy while Father Trebtoske was serving in Bryan-College Station. In his autobiography, he shares,

It was kind of an unusual thing for the assistant priest at Cristo Rey Church to drive a brand new Mercedes.... Sometimes after Mass, when some of the elderly ladies needed a ride home, I'd go get my Mercedes and open the door for them, and then I would drive them home in the Mercedes, and it was fun. It was a bit ostentatious, but, in those days, people really didn't know what a Mercedes was.... One time, I prepared a couple for their wedding [at Cristo Rey]. They were a young couple. They both worked, and they didn't have a car for a wedding trip, or anything like that. So, after the wedding, I gave them the keys to my car for their honeymoon, and they drove off in my Mercedes for four or five days.

Barbara (Velásquez) Rivera recalls receiving a ride in Father Trebtoske's car. Her face lights up as she says, "He let me ride in his Mercedes. That was such a treat!"

Hints of a Dangerous Neighborhood

Father Trebtoske recalls that he was no stranger to hospitals. In an interview, in which he described his ministry at Cristo Rey, Father Trebtoske shared, "I also visited the sick in the hospitals. We didn't have lay ministers in those days. The people from Cristo Rey went to

Brackenridge, and I would often go there with Holy Communion." Father Trebtocke also went to the hospital to respond to emergency calls.

He recalls one night in which he made two trips to the hospital, then was called out to another emergency. He relates:

One night, it was my turn to take the emergency [phone] calls. I got a call and had to go to the hospital. I came back, got back into my pajamas, and another phone call came. I went back to the hospital. When I came home again, and had just gotten into my pajamas again, I heard gunshots. I decided to stay up. Sure enough, I got a call. I went to the house [of the persons who had called]. A man was bleeding there and breathing his last. His family was there. He was shot while answering the door. Maybe it was a drug deal. He died that night.

Recalling another evening in which a bullet pierced his bedroom wall, Father Trebtocke shares, "One night, I heard a gunshot while I was in my room. The bullet went right through my wall, below the window. And that bullet hole was there for a long time."

Father Goertz shares that, though there were "incidents" in the neighborhood from time to time, it would be unfair to characterize East Austin as a dangerous place at that time. He says, "I felt totally safe. The neighborhood was peaceful, with some interruptions at times." He recalls, for instance, defending East Austin when his brother, Alfred, showed him the headline on the newspaper one day: "Gang Violence Breaking Out in East Austin." Assuring his brother that the incident was not characteristic of the neighborhood, Father Goertz replied, "Alfred, I live one and a half blocks from where [that purported incident] happened."

Father Goertz does remember helping to shelter one young man from the neighborhood who was involved in questionable activities. He shares,

Ernest was a *pechuco* in his late teens. One day, he came into the [parish office]. He was frightened. He said, "These guys are after me!" He explained that he was in downtown Austin, and that he pulled his .22 pistol on a group of

young men in a car. He put the gun in the window, pulled the trigger, and [the pistol] jammed. I said, "Give me the gun" [and he did]. We picked up some clothes for him, and I took him to my family's farm in Rockne. I said [to my father], "Papa, have Ernest here as a guest for a few weeks" [and he did]. Another time, we sent [Ernest] to Maryknoll, New York [to offer him some shelter].

Happily, Father Goertz relates that the story turned out well in the end: that Ernest was later married and devoted a great part of his life to fundraising for various religious communities and to his service as Grand Knight for his local council of the Knights of Columbus.

On another night, Father Goertz recalls a young man who had "designs to hurt his dad." Father Goertz tells the story:

He pulled a butcher knife from his shirt and put it on [my] desk [in the parish office]. As we talked, though, he picked up the knife and put it back inside his shirt. I said, 'I'm going to wait for you to leave the knife on the desk, and I'm not going to talk to you until you do. [The young man] finally got up and walked out [of the office]. I could hear him outside, walking back and forth. He came back in, put the knife down, and we talked.

Father Goertz remembers the drug situation in East Austin at that time, though he notes, "Drugs were there [in the neighborhood], but they were not an overriding reality affecting life in general. The drugs of choice were marijuana and heroin." He recalls riding in the cruiser of a sergeant of the Austin Police Department one day. Pointing to one street in the neighborhood, the officer noted, "that's a 'shooting gallery' [a place where drugs are infused]. We try to raid [the perpetrators], but they flush [the drugs] before we can get 'em."

Father Goertz also remembers sending people from the neighborhood to a drug addiction center in Fort Worth. He says, "I knew that [sending them to Fort Worth] was a respite, not a cure. [I knew that] if they came back to the neighborhood, they'd have the same challenges." He remembers one man who, on the afternoon before he was going to go to Fort Worth, asked Father Goertz for five dollars "to support [the man's] family while [he was] gone." Father

Goertz shares, "He probably used the money to get a 'fix,' but I would never characterize the neighborhood by these incidents."

Cecilia Mendoza, who was raised at 2302 Santa Rita Street, remembers that her mother did not let her out of the house, so that she did not see any signs of drug activity in the neighborhood. She does describe the neighborhood, though, as divided "between hoodlums and neighbors you could trust." The poet and activist Raúl "Roy" Salinas would later mention the Cristo Rey neighborhood in "A Trip Through the Mind Jail," a September 1969 poem which he wrote from prison, and which later became required reading in university courses in *Chicano* literature. In one small pericope of the poem, he writes,

Neighborhood of forays down to Buena Vista—
 Santa Rita Courts—*los projects*—friendly neighborhood
 cups a' rubbers on the rooftops, sneaking peaks
 in people's private nighttime bedrooms
 hearing the gifts of Juicy Fruit gum for
 the Projects girls chasing them in adolescent heat
 causing skinned knees and being run off for the night
 disenchanting walking home affections spurned
 stopping stay-out-late chicks in search of
 Modern Romance lovers, who always stood them up
 unable to leave their world in the magazine pages.
 Angry fingers grabbing, squeezing, feeling,
 french kisses imposed; close bodily contact, thigh and
 belly rubbings under shadows of Cristo Rey Church.

When Father Goertz hears these words, he says that the author took great "poetic license. That's not an accurate description of the neighborhood." Sixto Ramírez similarly shares, "I think Roy was exaggerating." Pedro "Pete" Torres concurs, "I don't think it's true." Pedro continues, "We didn't have models, like kids nowadays [do]. A lot of young men from this neighborhood went to the penitentiary." Sixto says, "A lot of people we grew up with got involved in drugs: [first] weed, then heroin. The recidivism rate was so high. That's why we started St. Dismas House."

When asked how Santa Rita Street has changed, Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles says, “It hasn’t changed, just the *delincuencia* [the delinquency] has gone down.” He recalls how “lazy boys” on the street used to hang out, “drinking, smoking marijuana and selling drugs.” He also remembers a news reporter coming to the neighborhood in the 1960s, to report on the murder of a resident. When asked for his comment on the incident, Guadalupe remembers thinking, “If I’m on the news tonight [speaking about this], I won’t be here [alive] tomorrow!”

The Liturgical Changes of the Second Vatican Council

In 1961, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. The first document produced by the bishops of the world at that council (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963) dealt with the reform of the Church’s celebration of the Mass. Father Goertz recalls that when he arrived at Cristo Rey in 1955, he celebrated three weekly Sunday Masses in Latin. There was also no celebration of the vigil (or Saturday evening) Mass. He recalls celebrating the Latin Mass in the old mission church:

[Father Briganti and I] got [the people] singing the *Kyrie*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* by rote. We told them, ‘We want you to share more in the celebration, so we’ll teach you [the chants]. One of us celebrated the Mass, and the other guy would be in front of the people, leading them in song.

Father Goertz shares a photo of himself (below) celebrating the Latin Mass in 1959 in the present-day church. In the photo, he is raising the chalice during the offertory, with his back to the people (which was the custom prior to the liturgical reforms of the council). “The choir sang in Latin,” he says. “There was no vernacular [English or Spanish, at the Mass] until 1963 to 1964.” At that time, Father Goertz remembers, those in attendance at Mass held missals that contained the Latin texts on one page and the English translations of those texts on the facing page. He estimates that roughly a third of parishioners spoke English at that time. Sarah “Sallie” (Martínez) Lozano remembers when the Mass changed from Latin to the



Father Goertz celebrating Mass in Latin.

vernacular (viz., English and Spanish). She says, "I never understood Latin. When they changed it, I thought 'Hallelujah!'"

As a result of the Second Vatican Council, two sweeping changes came to Cristo Rey: Men were no longer separated from women while

at Mass, and the dress code for attending Mass was relaxed. A recent conversation between Guadalupe (Briseño) Felán, Helen (Mendoza) Morales, Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña, and Dorothy Portillo, illustrates these changes:

Dorothy: [Before the Second Vatican Council,] there were no slacks or pants for women. No slacks whatsoever. And you had to cover your head. Cover your head!

Guadalupe: We had to cover our heads. The Catholic Church said you had to!

Mary Lou: They said we had to cover our head, like the Virgin Mary.

Guadalupe: It was God's house. You didn't disrespect Him.

Helen: And if you didn't have head cover, you had to put a tissue on your head with a bobby pin!

Dorothy: Then they started selling round little veils—some eight inches wide and circular—at Kress's and Woolworth.

Diocesan Sisters in the Cristo Rey Neighborhood

Bishop Reicher had the dream of founding a religious community of diocesan sisters. He shared this idea with Sister Mary Agnes Zinni, a Missionary Sister of the Immaculate Conception who served as administrator of Holy Cross Hospital (located at 1610 East 11th Street). Father Goertz shares that Sister Mary Agnes was “a very gifted and talented woman,” and that there was a rumor that she was going to be assigned to her community's motherhouse in Patterson, New Jersey. In the end, Sister Mary Agnes asked to be released from her religious community, in order to lead Bishop Reicher's new congregation of Diocesan Sisters. Sister Anne Marie Williams, another Missionary Sister of the Immaculate Conception who had been at Holy Cross Hospital since the 1940s, requested to incorporate into Reicher's new congregation as well. A third core member of this new community, Sister Delia Hernández, heard of the congregation through Father Ralph Ruiz of PADRES, and also asked to be released from her community in Mexico.

To accommodate the Sisters, Bishop Reicher rented a home at 1915 Haskell Street from Charles Villaseñor. Josefa (Valdez) Salinas recalls that the Sisters lived across the street from her. Sister Mary Agnes ministered to Catholic Charities of Central Texas, Sister Anne Marie

operated a girl's home near The University of Texas at Austin, and Sister Delia Hernández ministered to the Cristo Rey community. Father Charles Campise also remembers that these Sisters made home visits to people in the neighborhood and performed various charitable works in the parish.

Father Victor Goertz shares that when Bishop Reicher exited the diocese in 1971, the Diocesan Sisters knew their existence would be short-lived. Bishop Vincent Harris was not fond of the congregation created by his predecessor and was happy to see it disbanded. Sister Mary Agnes and Sister Anne Marie joined the Benedictine Sisters in Boerne, Texas, where Sister Mary Agnes would later be elected prioress of the community. Sister Delia Hernández would teach in a poor neighborhood of Milwaukee, before returning to San Antonio, Texas.

The Cristo Rey Montessori School

In the Fall of 1967, Sister Delia Hernandez, a Diocesan Sister, joined the parish staff of Cristo Rey. With her experience in the Montessori method, Sister Delia founded the Cristo Rey Montessori Pre-School in 1968. In the parish history compiled in 1972, Sister Delia wrote an extended description of the Montessori method. She also suggested that some twenty students, from age three to five, regularly attended the bilingual program. In addition to serving as the director of the Montessori program, Sister Delia also taught parish children as part of parish religious education programs.

Juanita (Rodríguez) Sánchez says that Sister Delia involved her in many projects: cleaning the church every Thursday, laundering altar linens and vestments, making purificators for use during the Mass, sewing dresses for girls receiving First Communion, and assuming responsibility for the church's *tiendita*, the gift shop operated from the bell tower of the church. Juanita remembers making aprons, dish towels, potholders and other handcrafted items that were sold in that gift shop.

Media Attention for Cristo Rey

Father Goertz recalls his first appearance on television. Dan Love, the general manager of KTBC, had invited him to make a weekly televised appearance during which he would speak for six to ten

minutes. Father Goertz remembers stepping onto the stage in the studio for the first taping: "I was a guest on the program, and [when the camera began rolling] the hostess said, 'Welcome to Woman's World.' I thought, 'What the hell have I gotten myself into?'"

Father Goertz was then asked to appear in a series, "Ideas in Focus," in which priests and laypersons discussed various issues. From that series, the idea of televising a monthly Mass arose, and Father Goertz offered his parish as the site for the taping. He even changed the parish's Sunday Mass schedule to accommodate the taping. Father Goertz recalls that the Mass at that time was still celebrated in Latin, and that a young man would sit in the present-day Blessed Sacrament Chapel offering a commentary on the Mass to the viewing audience. He also remembers the "three huge cameras, anchored to tripods: They were immovable!" One camera was in the loft, he says, and the other two were on the sanctuary floor. He also recalls his instructions to the film crew: "I told the cameramen, 'Don't film the back pews. They'll be empty until after the Mass begins!'"

A December 16, 1965 newspaper clipping from the Catholic Archives of Texas shows a KHFI-42 television trailer sitting on the south side of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. According to the news story, the 11:00 a.m. Sunday Mass at Cristo Rey was being televised on the fourth Sunday of each month, and the parish's Christmas Eve Midnight Mass in 1965 was to be televised by the news station as well. Father Victor Goertz recalls the television station's "huge trailer" which, he says, occupied the whole south parking lot of the church.

Cristo Rey's Involvement in the "War on Poverty"

Father Victor Goertz remembers the great needs experienced by many members of the East Austin community. As one of his many activities as a young priest, he served on the board of the Human Opportunities Corporation, an organization created as part of President Lyndon Baines Johnson's (1963-1969) "War on Poverty." As part of his board service, he recalls one day helping to interview persons for 50 to 60 available positions. He remembers hiring one young man, who would later become a dear friend: "We hired Ernest Perales, and we gave him the position of Housing Specialist. His job was to visit homes and see what improvements had to be done." Ernest, too, possessed fond memories of Father Goertz from his

childhood. Father Goertz remembers Ernest revealing to him, “When I was just a kid, you drove around the neighborhood. One day, you loaded us [children of the neighborhood] up and took us out for ice cream!”

The Birth of the St. Vincent de Paul Society

Now becoming more acutely aware of the needs of neighborhood residents, Father Goertz founded the parish’s St. Vincent de Paul Society in the 1960s as a means to assist those in need. When people came to the parish office, seeking assistance, members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society would be tasked with visiting them in their homes, so as to make a thorough assessment of their needs.

Father Frank Briganti recalls that the St. Vincent de Paul Society was “the apple of [Father] Victor’s eye.” He remembers, “The older men would meet. Everything was in Spanish. They said the rosary and did their thing: visiting the sick and distributing clothing. They got ‘down and dirty’ with the needy.”

Father Charles Campise remembers that the first members of this new ministry included Ben Sustaita, Julio Terán and Pete Velásquez. He remembers how Paul Sánchez, an altar boy who lived with his mother and seven siblings across the street from the rectory (at 2110 East Second Street), would come to the rectory asking for assistance. The St. Vincent de Paul Society would assist with food, clothing and vouchers.

Father Goertz tells the story of one cold day in which a woman arrived at the parish office with her three children. The gas in her home was cut off, since she was unable to pay her bill. Father Goertz remembers that he had no money, and that the parish account was nearly depleted after paying the parish’s monthly bills. Still, he told the woman, “Let me have the bill. We’ll take care of it.” It was a bill for \$24.76. Father Goertz shares that later that afternoon he was walking along Congress Avenue in downtown Austin, when he spotted a roll of bills wrapped in a rubber band. He scanned the crowded sidewalks for the person who might have dropped the money. It didn’t seem anyone was looking for the money. He picked up the roll and counted the bills. Seeing that the roll contained \$25, he concluded, “I know what this is for!”

The Building of a New Parish Center and the Expansion of the Rectory

As the old mission church was transformed into the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center, it was obvious that a new parish hall and/or community center would be needed. In the spring of 1966, Father Goertz signed a contract for the building of a new \$45,000 parish center. A photo (below) of the signing shows Father Goertz present at the table with various parish leaders, along with the architect and representatives of the construction company, C&H Construction, that would lead the project.



Father Goertz (center) signing the contract for the construction of the new parish center.

Months later, on October 2, 1966, Fathers Goertz, Dokupil and Trebtoske inaugurated the parish center with a special blessing. With the facility now open, according to the parish history compiled in 1972, "the ladies of the parish continued the tradition of serving breakfast every Sunday morning." The octagonal building also hosted many meetings, dinners, wedding receptions, dances and parties during the subsequent years. The photo below shows the parish center in 1972. One sees how the front doors of the facility opened directly to the street at that time.



The Cristo Rey Parish Center, 1966.

The CR Club: Formed to Fundraise

When the new church was completed, it seemed to lack only one thing: air conditioning. To meet this need, various married couples of the parish formed the Cristo Rey Club, or “CR Club” as it was more popularly known. Father Goertz shares, “When we finished the church in May 1959, the duct work was in [for the air conditioning], but we couldn’t afford the unit.” During the subsequent years, the CR Club hosted numerous dinners and dances in order to one day have an air conditioning unit installed in the church.

Father Goertz recalls various members of the CR Club: Domingo and Henrietta Juárez, Lupe and Anita Mireles, Paul and Mary Ramos, Dave and Susie Reséndiz, Fred and Vickie Tanguma, Eddie and Elizabeth Torres, and “Rocker” and Lena Verastique. Father Charles Campise recalls the following additional members during 1967-1969: Marcelo and Felice Arocha, Jack and Patsy Gonzales, Mrs. and Mrs. Ben Sustaita, Mrs. and Mrs. Julián Terán, Tony and Vicky Torres, and Pete and Tonie Velásquez. John Cázares says that he and Ben Cruz were also part of the CR Club, and that Polo Ramos was the head chef preparing the steaks in the kitchen.

Father Campise remembers,

[The CR Club] had dances every other week, on a Saturday night, at the parish hall. Felice [Arocha] and Patsy [Gonzales] prepared the food and sold it to the people who came. They would bring in a *conjunto* [a small musical

group playing Mexican music] and make \$500 a month, which was good money back then!

Francisco “Frank” Granado similarly recalls,

We had dances in the parish hall twice a month. All the money we made was to pay for the air conditioning. We would take turns at the door, and my wife helped in the kitchen. We had live music: a *conjunto* with accordion. We even hired Johnny Degollado a few times!

Dottie Chapa remembers that her parents, Marcelo and Felice (Gonzales) Arocha, were very active in the CR Club: “Some 30 couples belonged to the CR Club. They had barbeques and dances. They would sell tickets for prizes and bottles. That’s how they built the parish center!”

In the end, the necessary funds were raised and the installation of air conditioning in the church was a welcomed addition, says Hermalinda Zamarripa, who recalls her sister, Ana, previously fainting in the church due to the heat one hot August day. Once the air conditioning was installed, Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles remembers that it could not be turned on when the church’s annual *jamaica* was being hosted on parish grounds because, he says, “It would blow the *puestos* [festival stands] away!”

The Departure of Father Trebtoske

After only three years in the parish, Father Trebtoske departed from Cristo Rey. In his recent autobiography, he concludes that “The Cristo Rey story was special because of the people of the parish, the priests I worked with, and, of course, the fact that Sandi had put together a school...I enjoyed my stay at Cristo Rey.” In a recent interview, he confirmed, “The parish worked well together, and we [also] had our *fiestas*.”

Chapter Nine

“¡Viva la Raza!”

The Mexican-American Community Begins to Organize

“We started organizing, and it all started because we wanted to get rid of the poll tax!”

Sixto Ramírez

“They were being paid 35 cents per hour. That was unacceptable. I called an organizer, and we called a strike.”

Father Frank Briganti

“Milton Smith was probably not an evil man. He was simply a capitalist....His wife, though, was evil.”

Santo “Buddy” Ruiz

“We [the priests of Cristo Rey] got in the middle of that.”

Father Victor Goertz

Still Smarting from the Poll Tax

Father Frank Briganti recalls that when he arrived at Cristo Rey in 1956, the people of the congregation “were still smarting from going from house to house, raising money to pay people’s poll tax, so that they could vote.” He explains that voters in that era had to pay two dollars to register to vote. Activists rallied to gather the necessary monies for people to enjoy the right to vote. With a hint of sadness in his voice, however, Father Briganti recalls, “There was just as much indifference [with respect to voting] then as there is now.”

Sixto Ramírez says that early organizing efforts within the Mexican-American community of Austin sprang from the poll tax. He shares, “We started organizing, and it all started because we wanted to get rid of the poll tax!” He continues the story:

Me and some folks rented a club [at 2300 First Street]. We sat around, drank beer and organized [a group called] “*LUCHA por la Raza*.” I was the president for some time. And when we elected our first Mexican-American county commissioner, he had a celebration there!

Other groups were also beginning to form, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the Mission Club, and the Mexican American Catholic Alliance. Sixto recalls that, when the latter met, members began their meetings by reciting “Mexican American Catholic Alliance” one word at a time as they made the sign of the cross and touched their forehead, chest, left shoulder and right shoulder.

Early Attempts to Organize Money: The Cristo Rey Catholic Credit Union

Father Frank Briganti was interested not only in organizing people, but also in organizing money. Though the two events are unrelated, he recalls, “On the night that Pope Pius [XII] died [viz., October 9, 1958], I started a credit union here at Cristo Rey.” He shares,

We took the big room [protruding toward East Second Street from the facility at 2201 East 2½ Street] and turned it into a credit union. The guy who agreed to run it was a retired oil man, Bob Byers. It was the Cristo Rey Catholic Credit Union, and you were supposed to be a member of the parish [in order to be able to enjoy its services]. The only way it stayed afloat was that [Bob] pumped money into it.

Father Briganti says that Father Don McLeish later wanted to expand the credit union. Father McLeish started a diocesan credit union, into which the Cristo Rey Catholic Credit Union was subsumed.

Early Attempts to Influence City Council

Prior to 1946, when the necessary right-of-way was purchased for present-day IH35, East Avenue served as the eastern boundary of the

city. Residents of East Austin still remembered how White residents of Austin threw stones at Black residents and “Mexicans” who went near the gazebo in Palm Park. Now that such overt racism was somewhat declining, Cristo Rey parishioners organized to petition City Council to leave East Third Street open, so that their families could more easily cross to Palm Park. This was an early example of the efforts of the Mexican and Mexican-American community of Austin at community organizing.

Early Attempts to Unionize

Father Frank Briganti recalls that, due to their limited education and work skills, many members of the Cristo Rey community were happy to hold “any low-paying job.” This situation propelled him into organizing labor unions. He shares,

A [person from a] department store called [the rectory], looking for boys to distribute flyers for ten cents a day. Many women worked at the chicken-plucking factory at [present-day] IH35 and Holly [Street, near the site of the present-day Holiday Inn]. They were being paid 35 cents per hour. That was unacceptable. I called an organizer, and we called a strike—but then he disappeared, and we were “hung out to dry.” From there, we went on to organize laundry, where St. Edward’s was one of the big customers. Then, we went to furniture. As we rolled, more active bodies came along, many of them through *Cursillo*. Either they worked in these places [where we were organizing], or they knew others who did. Workers would come into our [parish] office, and I’d ask them, ‘What do you want?’ And we worked to get them what they wanted.”

Pedro “Pete” Torres recalls working for Austin Industries, a furniture company in South Austin. “They fired me,” he says. “I was young, and we were trying to bring a union in. When I started there, I was making 25 cents an hour. By the time they ran me out, we were making 50!”

Father Briganti recalls one sweet success, in which the Glastron Boat Company was “stalling and stalling and stalling” to allow workers to unionize. After not receiving a large loan due to their

inability to maintain a stable workforce, the company finally allowed for a union presence.

Large Numbers from the Cristo Rey Neighborhood Flock to Economy Furniture

Father Goertz recalls that many parishioners worked at Economy Furniture, the largest furniture manufacturer west of the Mississippi River. The company's factory at that time was located within the parish boundaries of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. According to the 2010 documentary, "The Economy Furniture Strike," narrated by Dan Rather, 90% of Economy Furniture employees lived within walking distance of the factory. The company was owned by Father Goertz's Jewish acquaintances, Milton and Helen Smith. He remembers, "They had been to the Holy Land, and they brought me a rosary. We had a cordial relationship, but we weren't close. [Milton and Helen] provided employment for many [of our parishioners]."

Manuel Casas Villanueva remembers first going to work at Economy Furniture in 1961. Whereas many employees worked for minimum wage (viz., 90 cents per hour), he recalls that those who helped to produce the furniture frames and upholstery were paid by the piece. He explains,

[By producing more pieces,] you had a chance to make more than minimum wage. But they had one guy solely dedicated to be the timekeeper. They would start retiming the pieces that you were upholstering, and it was guaranteed that when they finished, you would have to work harder to keep up. The whole system made us envious and greedy.

When Antonio "Tony" Quiroz started working as a machine operator at Economy Furniture in 1964, he was making \$1.12 per hour. He says, "At the time, it was one of the best jobs you could get. Everybody here [in East Austin] worked there." He remembers, "You had to cut so many pieces per hour." He also recalls what he heard from fellow employees: After working at the factory for six or seven years, they were only making \$1.17 per hour, only five cents more than Antonio. "That wasn't right," he says. "Those guys were there a

long time, and I was making almost as much as them!" Antonio remembers the grievances that workers had with the company:

[Milton Smith] said he didn't have any money to pay us, and yet he donated ten million dollars to *B'nai B'rith* [a Jewish anti-defamation league]. We only had one week of vacation, during a Jewish holiday, and if you didn't work on the Friday before and the Monday after, you didn't get paid for the vacation.

Santo "Buddy" Ruiz adds that the workers at Economy Furniture were also tired of the abusive treatment they received from their employers. He shares:

Milton Smith was probably not an evil man. He was simply a capitalist. He believed that the almighty dollar is worth more than people, and he made an enormous amount of money by paying cheap labor to loyal, hardworking *Latinos*. His wife, though, was evil. She was abusive. She called people names. She had nothing but contempt for employees, and it rose to a crescendo with her yelling at us and giving us the finger.

Robert T. Herrera recalls that he was one of the targets of Helen Smith's anger after two other organizing "kingpins" (viz., Frank Ramírez and Lencho Hernández) were gone from the company. He tells the story of being called into Helen's office:

She said, "Two are gone, and now you're next." I told her, "Helen, there's something I want to tell you: What you want and what you'll get are two different things." I would become her ultimate nightmare. She said she would have me fired within two weeks. She said, "I have a degree from Harvard and Yale and Princeton. What do you have?" I told her, "I have a doctoral degree from the Eastside School of Hard Knocks and a doctoral degree from Alleycat University."

Fortunately, Robert says, he had an informant within Helen's office who kept him apprised of what was being said about him and his fellow workers.

Antonio recalls the policies that were implemented at the company regarding employee communications: "A group of us started talking about [the situation], but you couldn't talk about it during work time, only at break time or after work." In the meantime, Robert was looking for leaders within the various departments of the company. He would tell the workers, "We need people from each department who are willing to form a union and keep their mouth shut. Once the company finds out, the war is on and there's no turning back." Those leaders began to meet at the bar at 2300 East First Street. Father Charles Campise remembers that he belonged to a group of Hispanic Democrats that weekly met at the same bar, so that he noted the presence of union sympathizers at the bar. "They wanted higher wages and benefits," he says.

This group began printing leaflets that they distributed to other workers. They also printed T-shirts. In the photograph proudly displayed on the front cover of one publication that they produced, a worker is shown wearing a T-shirt. On the front of the shirt is a large image of an Economy Furniture worker with a large metal screw piercing his body.

The Role of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in the Economy Furniture Strike

Father Goertz recalls his first meeting in April 1968 with parishioners who were speaking of the possibility of striking.

We [the priests of Cristo Rey] got in the middle of that. Víctor [Ruiz] had been working for [Milton and Helen] for thirty years, and he was talking of walking out. I had to look into it. [The workers and I] met at Cristo Rey, and [Milton] Smith thought I stabbed him in the back.

Victor's son, Santo "Buddy" Ruiz, says, "*No somos pendejos* [We're not stupid]. We knew that if we met at the church, we were 'legitimate.'" Santo also shares the following tender reflection about the priests who were involved at that time:

You can't even imagine the force, the influence that the Church had. Had it not been there, the strike would not have happened. How do you capture [in words] those

beautiful priests? Do you know the legitimacy they gave us? How many minds, how many people would be willing to stick their hands in the jaws of this “monster,” had their priests not been there?

Robert T. Herrera remembers the first time that Father Goertz got involved in the conversation. He shares:

Jimmy Johns [the head of a union in Dallas] and Wiley Smith [the director of organizing for an upholsters’ union] had rented the parish center. Frank [Ramírez], Greg [Mojica] and I were sitting at a table on the stage. Frank and Greg were the co-chairs of the meeting, and I was the recording secretary. The kitchen door opened, and lo and behold, it was Fr. Goertz! I’ll never forget the gleam and smile on his face. Apparently, someone had “filled him in.” He sat in the back row, in the last chair, close to the door, and he listened intently to every word.

Father Goertz remembers addressing the crowd during that meeting. He recalls:

It was Holy Week, and we used the parish center for the meeting. It wasn’t a big bunch [of people]. I said, “Why don’t we put our feet where our mouth is [and strike]? I’m not going to tell you how to vote, but I will share some information: I’m not sure the Teamsters are who you want to unionize you.” I had questions about the reputation of the Teamsters at the time.

Robert recalls his conversation with the priest after the meeting had ended.

When the meeting was ended, [Father Goertz] came and said, “I want to be part of this.” At that time, Father Goertz didn’t know that Milton Smith had previously used another priest at Cristo Rey to kill an earlier strike effort when Economy was here in East Austin. They got a Father from Cristo Rey to tell the workers that having a union was not wise, and that the company would take care of them. We didn’t want Father Goertz to be caught in that situation.

Father Goertz said, "I have always loved a good fight." We told him, "Father, we're going to the doghouse on this one," and he said, "I'll gladly join you in the doghouse!" That's how Father Goertz came aboard.

Robert says that Milton and Helen Smith approached Father Goertz for his assistance in speaking with the workers. Robert shares the story:

Víctor Ruiz approached Father Goertz and filled him in on the first time [that the Smith's had used a priest at Cristo Rey to quiet workers]. Milton "went to the well" a second time. He approached Father Goertz, and Father Goertz said, "no." Now, [Father Goertz] was officially "in the doghouse." [Father Goertz later] said, "The heat really came down, but I weathered the storm, and I was not going to be bullied by their tactics."

At the same time, according to the 2010 documentary, "The Economy Furniture Strike," Milton and Helen Smith were also using Bishop Reicher in an attempt to quell any possible strike. They brought him to the cafeteria of the factory to speak with workers. The documentary says that he attempted to talk them out of striking, and that he even invited them to kneel down and pray about what they were doing.

On November 21, 1968, the employees of Economy Furniture gathered in the parish hall of Cristo Rey Catholic Church and called for a strike. Seven days later, 275 employees walked out of the factory together. Robert T. Herrera remembers the event:

We were going to walk out at 4:00 p.m. The women had put everything up and had their purses. David Nicholson, the department supervisor, crossed his arms, in front of the clock. I was leading. When I got close, he stepped back. I punched out, I crossed my arms and stood across from him. It was a "Mexican stand-off." Everyone except fourteen company employees filed between us.

Father Goertz says that after the vote to strike, the priests of Cristo Rey walked the picket lines with the workers. He is quick to add, "I'm

not a rabble-rousing, rebellious sort." Father Campise didn't seem the rabble-rousing sort either, but he remembers a photo of himself walking the picket line, on the front page of the local newspaper one Sunday. "I was just going to be in the crowd," he says, "but a couple of guys pushed me to the front." Santo "Buddy" Ruiz is quick to add how the strikers tried to protect the priests. He says,

Dick Reavis, a socialist from the Progressive Labor Party, showed up at the picket line with his communist friends. They were bringing us food and donations. I stopped him. I said, "Dick, we're Catholics. We're praying for your conversion!" I knew that if the newspaper got a photo of them, our priests would be in trouble!

Robert T. Herrera shares,

Father Goertz walked with us on the picket line and was heavily in prayer for us. He let us know how the front office [of the Diocese of Austin] wanted to kill [the strike]. He was officially in the doghouse with us, but he fought. He didn't roll over and give up.

Robert also shares, "We were worried that they might ship him out to San Saba and leave him there. Wiley [Smith] pulled some strings behind the scenes—even higher than the bishop—to make sure it didn't happen."

Antonio "Tony" Quiroz well remembers the strike. He says that some 252 workers walked out of the company. He shares, "On the first day of the strike, Texas Rangers were there, and they ain't fun. They picked us up one-by-one and took us for a ride and questioned us." He says that strikers reported to a portable "picket shack" that they set up outside the factory and took turns walking for four to eight hours at a time. Robert affirms, "We walked the picket line in sleet and snow, in the blazing heat and in fierce wind, twenty-four hours a day, around the clock!"

Antonio recalls that support for the strike came from throughout the nation. Donations arrived from Chicago, Philadelphia, California and Atlanta. Local business leaders also helped to support strikers and their families. Antonio shares that one young manager at Kentucky Fried Chicken, Roy Gómez, often went down to the picket

line. Roy gave Antonio a part-time job cutting chicken, and would sometimes share “a big box of overcooked chicken” with the Quiroz family. He says that Fidel Estrada of Estrada’s Cleaners also assisted with food.

Many people speak of the tension created by this strike. Manuel Casas Villanueva says, “In families, there was a lot of conflict. One brother would leave [and go on strike], and the other would stay. There were even divorces over it!” According to the documentary narrated by Dan Rather, three children died as a result of their families having lost their health insurance coverage. Santo “Buddy” Ruiz paints a darker story:

There was a lot of violence in the community that tore us apart: shootings, beatings, cuttings, confrontations at H-E-B on First and Seventh [Streets], bad feelings between original strikers and the ‘scabs’ who crossed the picket lines.

“Unduly Influenced by a Priest”

According to Father Goertz, Milton and Helen Smith’s lawyer claimed that the “people were being unduly influenced by a priest [viz., former Cristo Rey Associate Pastor Father Frank Briganti].” At the time, Father Briganti was circulating a letter suggesting that a strike by the employees of Economy Furniture would be a “good thing.” In his letter, he wrote, “Is the Catholic Church opposed to unions? No. Is the Catholic Church opposed to a strike at Economy Furniture? It is neither for nor against it. What is my personal opinion? I think it’s a good thing.”

An attorney representing the Smith family responded to Father Briganti’s letter, charging that the employees of Economy Furniture were “uneducated, Mexican-American Catholics.” In the letter, he accused Father Briganti of being “a self-styled but stupid and uninformed emancipator of the Mexican people,” and he asserted that the priest had been “bamboozled by union organizers.” The community was infuriated. Future mayor Gustavo García chaired a meeting in the auditorium of Huston-Tillotson University. Father Goertz, who served on a city commission for human rights at the time, remembers, “500 people showed up [at the meeting,] ready to fight!”

Father Goertz recalls later being invited to lunch with Milton and Helen Smith's attorney. He says it was one of the few times in his life that he exploded. When the attorney bragged that he himself was a Catholic, a graduate of Notre Dame University, and a frequent recipient of Communion, Father Goertz snapped, "[with your words about 'uneducated, Mexican-American Catholics,'] you goddamn nearly started a riot!"

Bishop Reicher issued a statement in support of his friends, Milton and Helen Smith, who were generous benefactors of Holy Cross Hospital. As a result, strikers picketed the diocesan chancery on North Congress as well. Gonzalo Barrientos shares the story:

Some monsignor came out of [the chancery] and said something like, "You goddamn, dirty, Mexican bastards, you SOB's!" One of my kids looked at me and said, "Daddy, he can't be talking like that. He's a priest!" It was a time of dynamic change.

The picketing also spread to vendors of Economy Furniture in Austin, San Antonio, Dallas and Houston.

The Austin Chicano Huelga

In December 1968, the Mexican-American community showed its support for the strikers during the *Austin Chicano Huelga*, a large public demonstration in the streets of downtown Austin. Within a month after that event, the Travis County Human Rights Commission voted 12-7 for the removal of Milton Smith from their commission, but the City Council then voted to retain him on the commission with a vote of 4-2.

To mark the first anniversary of the beginning of the Economy Furniture strike, another *Austin Chicano Huelga* was scheduled for November 30, 1969. The Austin City Council informed organizers Sixto Ramírez and Santo "Buddy" Ruiz that a parade permit request for the event would not be granted. Sixto and Santo ignored the decision and a restraining order was placed against them. Undeterred, they attended the event and encouraged people to march along the sidewalks to the Capitol.

A Visit by César Chávez

The Economy Furniture strike continued, and a letter-writing campaign was initiated to bring renowned activist César Chávez to Austin. César repeatedly declined the invitation. On November 29, 1970, a third Austin Chicano *Huelga* attracted thousands to the Capitol, to mark the second anniversary of the strike. Father Joe Znotas, pastor of Santa Julia Catholic Church, led the benediction. Father Patrick Flores, the future archbishop of San Antonio, was also in attendance.

In the meantime, Santo "Buddy" Ruiz, who was now working with the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C., was also working to get César Chávez to Austin. Santo shares,

César was not going to come down [to Austin]. César was a smart promoter, and he had the whole U.S. participating in grape and lettuce boycotts. He wanted to guard that jealously. But now I was calling him on behalf of the AFL-CIO, of which he wanted to become a member! When he said "no," I wrote him a letter on George Meany's letterhead. [George Meany was the founding president of the AFL-CIO.] I said, "Some people leading your grape boycott [here in Austin] are picketing [at Economy Furniture]. You think you're the movement, César? You're not. If you don't come to Austin, we will seriously consider in which *huelga* [strike] we should be expending our resources."

On December 19, 1970, the strikers received a letter from César Chávez, stating that he would join them in Austin on February 6, 1971, presuming he was released from the prison from which he penned the letter. Santo also recalls César Chávez later chiding him, "I'll go [to Austin], but writing letters like this will not promote your position in this movement."

Antonio "Tony" Quiroz remembers when César Chávez arrived in Austin on February 5, 1971. He tells the story:

When [César Chávez] came the first time, there was a \$250,000 bounty on him. When we picked him up from the airport, we were all armed. Charlie Villaseñor from

Mission Funeral Home lent us limousines to pick him up. Pancho's brother, [Dolores] "Lole" Ramírez had a '57 Chevy. We all gathered around [César]. The cars were parked behind one another, and we made it look like [César] went into one of the limos. He was really in the '57 Chevy!

After speaking at the Montopolis Community Center, César joined the picket lines outside of Economy Furniture. Photos also exist of César speaking at Cristo Rey Catholic Church, though memories of how the visit coincides with his presence in Montopolis and at the picket line are less clear.

The Economy Furniture Strike Comes to an End

Within a month of César's visit, on March 3, 1971, the strikers met at the parish hall of Santa Julia Catholic Church and voted to end the strike. Conditions for the reinstatement of strikers were agreed upon in September, and 141 strikers applied for positions. 136 of them were reinstated.

Santo Julio "Buddy" Ruiz reflects on this victory:

We were learning. We were young and inexperienced. The Economy Furniture Strike taught us that we could take on business and big business leaders, like Milton Smith. We were learning that in order to control our future and the decisions that were being made, we had to be involved in the political system. We were creating a revolution in thinking and change, and we moved virtually with our own leadership to become a united voice for people's rights.

As a sign of their great appreciation, the strike organizers would later gift Father Goertz a large portrait of himself, which hung in the parish center for the next forty years. Robert T. Herrera recalls, "We were going to put a plaque on it [that said], "On behalf of the Organizing Union Committee of Upholsters Union of North America AFL-CIO. Wiley Smith, Director of Organizing. Jimmy Johns, Organizer."

The First Hispanics in Austin Seek Public Office

Humphrey (1997) maintains that the assault on segregation during the 1950s and 1960s was led by Austin's African American community. During the late 1960s, however, the Mexican American community was organizing around *La LUCHA*, a group consisting of the likes of Sixto Ramírez and Ernest Nieto, who worked for paved and lighted streets and freedom from harassment from police. In 1969, they came "heartbreakingly close," says Humphrey, to electing Santo J. "Buddy" Ruiz to the Austin City Council.

Only five months after the strike began at Economy Furniture in East Austin, Santo Julio "Buddy" Ruiz was on the ballot for City Council. Robert T. Herrera explains,

"Buddy" and his friend, Andy Ramírez, wanted change in the establishment, and they were fiercely into civil rights. They were making war with city hall, and that was new to us. They did some research on council members. [The council members] had their face in the gravy. They were corrupt, taking money and bribes, all contracts went to the Westside, and we were getting virtually nothing. Now and then, they'd throw us a crumb or two. [Buddy and Andy] targeted Place 4 on City Council. [They were saying,] "Look at the City Council: It's all White! [The council member in Place 4] represents the eastside, and he's not Hispanic! He's Anglo and lives on the Westside! He doesn't even bother to come to his precinct! The precinct is ours, and he doesn't represent us!"

Forty years after the events, Santo "Buddy" Ruiz shares:

Latino involvement [in politics at that time] was nil. No [Latino] candidates had ever been proposed. *Latinos* were dependent on the *gringo* establishment for leadership and guidance, and businessmen like Roy Velásquez were afraid to take them on—because then they wouldn't be able to get bank loans.

Santo remembers when the "White establishment" first attempted to "buy" him. He shares:

They sent Louie Lebowitz over to see me and to make me an offer: They'd give \$10,000 to my race and \$10,000 to me if I agreed to two things: to get off my "zoning kick," and to let them use my name on a conservative endorsement. I was willing to take the \$10,000 for my campaign, but I was not willing to get off the "zoning thing." We knew that East Austin would belong to realtors that far back. They wanted to zone East Austin for "urban renewal," code for "Negro removal." And I was saying that zoning change notices had to go out to everyone within 1,000 feet [not just the 150 feet that were required at the time], and that meetings for zoning changes had to be held at night when people could attend them.

He also remembers the smear campaign against him by Ben White, Louis Shanks and other prominent Austinites through the purchase of a full-page ad in the *Austin American-Statesman*. "The ad was very effective," he recalls.

On the first ballot on April 5, 1969, Santo secured 31% of the vote. On May 3, he was defeated in the run-off, with 46% of the vote. He says, "Had I not had 300 loyal union people from my neighborhood," I wouldn't have made it to the run-off!" Santo also remembers the lessons that the *Latino* community learned from this experience:

During my campaign, we learned that you had to have serious influence in your precinct. You had to "control" precincts. There were 101 precincts, and we knew we were controlling about 20 of them. We learned basic political organizing. We also learned that the presumed alliance between Hispanics and Blacks doesn't exist: The African-Americans always voted for *gringos*, not for *Latinos*. We do owe Black leadership credit and respect for bringing us along during the Civil Rights movement, but [I still say to my African-American friends,] "You still see the *gringo* as superior to you, and the *Latino* as inferior to you."

Santo also remembers the words of his father, Víctor Ruiz, when Santo shared with him his feelings of failure. Víctor told his son,

You didn't fail. You were part of things that changed this community. We are thinking and talking differently. Our community now believes that one of us should be representing us. Son, it wasn't about you getting elected. It was about making our community better. It was about a voice being heard in our community, [a voice] that will go on.

One year later, in 1970, Richard Moya became the first Hispanic elected to public office in Travis County. In 1972, Gustavo García became the first Hispanic elected to the Board of Trustees of the Austin Independent School District. In 1974, Gonzalo Barrientos became the first Hispanic to represent the people of Travis County in the Texas House of Representatives, and in 1975, Richard Moya's campaign manager, John Treviño, became the first Hispanic elected to the Austin City Council.

The Arrival of Father Charles and Father Charles

In the summer of 1967, Father Charles Campise and Father Charles Davis of the Diocese of Austin were assigned to assist Father Victor Goertz at Cristo Rey.

Father Campise served the community for two years, and Father Davis assisted the parish's youth ministry efforts for three years. Father Campise shares that Father Goertz was "a very kind person and a real leader of the people." He says that the priests weekly met to discuss priorities at the parish office, which, at that time, was within their private residence. He notes that the pastor "allowed me and [Father] Davis to do whatever we felt was called for [in any given situation]." The parish staff at that time consisted of Tina Gómez, who served as the parish secretary,



Fr. Charles Davis & men of Cristo Rey.

He notes that the pastor "allowed me and [Father] Davis to do whatever we felt was called for [in any given situation]." The parish staff at that time consisted of Tina Gómez, who served as the parish secretary,

Sandi Yonikus, who served as Director of Religious Education, and Ms. Acosta, who served as the priests' housekeeper.

A native of Houston, Father Campise came to Cristo Rey with some knowledge of the Spanish language. He spent four previous summers in Chinajuapa, Puebla, Mexico where he daily read the Mass to the people of one town over a public announcement system and visited the rural people in the mountains. He confesses, "I knew some Spanish, but I never talked it. The elderly women [of the parish] would make me speak Spanish. If I couldn't finish a sentence, they'd finish it for me." Father Campise remembers that he and Father Goertz took turns celebrating the parish's weekday 6:30 a.m. Mass in Spanish. He notes, "[Father] Davis didn't speak Spanish, so he didn't have to get up early!" The parish at that time was largely Mexican and Mexican-American, with only a few persons from Cuba who were connected to The University of Texas at Austin.

A native of Dubuque, Iowa, Father Davis joined the Diocese of Austin after completing his seminary studies in Missouri. Father Campise shares of Father Davis: "He was a constant smile. He was fun to live with. He seemed to be a little naïve, and I was always playing practical jokes on him. He always wore a rosary around his neck; that was 'his thing.'"

Responding to the Needs of Neighborhood Residents

Father Campise remembers that the three priests took turns covering emergency calls from Brackenridge Hospital. Each would be "on call" for a week at a time, so that he could "sleep in" the remaining two weeks. He shares, "At 3:00 a.m., I could make it to Brackenridge in five minutes. I'd cross First Street to Holly. There were no stop signs there [on Holly Street]." Once IH35 was completed, during his second year of ministry, Father Campise says he didn't have to stop at all between Cristo Rey and the hospital. He remembers that the parish's volunteer maintenance man, Felix Luna, would give Father Campise's 1967 blue Impala an occasional tune up. Father Campise says of Felix, "He was Mister Fix-It."

Father Campise recalls one visit to the hospital in particular. He shares the story of offering to hear a man's last confession:

It was one of my first calls to Brackenridge. The gunshot victim was stretched out and had no shirt. You could see all the bullets in his chest, from a .22 magnum. I asked him in Spanish, "Do you want to confess?" He answered me in English, "Hell no. I ain't confessin' nothin'!"

Not all priests in East Austin were as accessible as the priests at Cristo Rey. Father Campise remembers that Father Stanley Guzik, the pastor of neighboring Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, for instance, refused to respond to calls from Brackenridge. Father Frank Briganti also recalls the only time in nine years in which he saw Father Victor Goertz slightly irritated. He shares the story:

[Father] Goertz was so incredibly level. There was only one time that I saw him slightly irritated. [Father Peter] Noble, the pastor of Santa Julia [Catholic Church], closed his gates at 6:00 p.m. and said, "Don't bother me." A family [from that parish] called our rectory. They were *troqueros* [migrant workers], getting ready to head north with other migrant workers when they realized their truck was not blessed. [Father] Victor answered the phone. He asked them why they didn't go to their pastor in Govalle. They replied, "He gets mad if we bother him." So they'd call here [to Cristo Rey]. Under the surface, you could tell [Father Goertz] was irritated. He couldn't believe that a priest could be so inaccessible for the stuff so important to these folks.

Father Campise notes that the neighborhood around Cristo Rey was ordinarily quiet. He says, "[Father] Davis and I used to walk over to the [Santa Rita] projects to visit people. The people in the neighborhood were very receptive to our being there. Most [of them] were Catholic. Only a few were Methodists or Baptists."

Ministry at Cristo Rey Catholic Church in the Late 1960s

Father Campise recalls the great amount of activity at the parish. He shares, "[Father] Davis and I led a hectic life. The doorbell rang from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. We were like a doctor's office, with people coming to the door and making appointments. A lot of [our] business

came from Santa Rita, Santa María and Santa Rosa Streets. One Sunday, I baptized 28 kids. I even buried six Vietnam vets shot up in the war.” Father Campise recalls that he would return to the rectory from meetings or Masses at 9:00 p.m., only to find people waiting to speak with a priest.

Father Davis coordinated the parish’s Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), while Father Campise drew together a club for young adult singles. Father Campise remembers the latter.

Four young men formed the core of the young adults’ club. We ate lunch together every week, and we used to raise money. We’d raffle off a gallon of whiskey for ten cents a ticket—and we’d make at least \$100! Once, we [the young adults’ club] announced a trip to The University of Texas at Austin for elementary and junior high kids. Most of them had never been across the interstate. We’d take them across and sensitize them to that part of the city. Then we’d buy them hamburgers at Johnny Boy’s.

Father Campise also became involved in ministering to the troubled youths of the neighborhood, a ministry that would shape his future. He shares the story of *La Puerta Abierta* [The Open Door]:

A couple of teens were showing up at the rectory at night, claiming that their parents had abused them. I would talk to them, then call their parents and try to resolve the issues. I came across the idea that we needed a runaway house. This was in the days before state funding. We got together Hispanic teachers and our young adults club, and we got them to donate five dollars a month each. With the \$100 we raised each month, we rented a house near Santa Julia [Catholic Church]. If a runaway showed up at the rectory, I would call the person “on call,” and [s/he] would spend the night with the runaway. We called it *La Puerta Abierta*, and it lasted for two years, until I was long gone [from the parish].

Father Campise explains that during his second year at Cristo Rey he began wondering what he wanted to do with his life. He began to attend two graduate courses in social work at The University of Texas

at Austin. He explains, “We were doing lots of social work [at Cristo Rey]. It was outpatient service. In addition to conventional parish activities, the brunt of the parish was a demand for those [outpatient] services.”

The Censure of Father Davis

In 1967, the Mexican-American Student Organization (MASO) at The University of Texas at Austin worked with local residents to convince City Council to fence junkyards in East Austin and to restrict new ones. Santo “Buddy” Ruiz recalls, “A year later, MASO and the *viejitos* [elders] took on Palm School.” They pulled Father Charles Davis into their quest to close Palm Elementary School, so that their children would not need to cross the busy interstate on their way to and from school.

Father Charles Campise remembers the day in which Father Charles Davis was censured by Bishop Reicher for his involvement in the matter. Father Campise shares the story:

Almost all the children from Palm had to walk across the interstate—and it was a busy highway. [Father] Davis worked with the Palm PTA to move the school to the Eastside. He wanted it at [the present-day site of the Rebecca Baines Johnson residential tower]. The bishop [Reicher] was in cahoots with LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] to build there, and LBJ called Reicher saying, “Call Davis off!” It was the only time that I can recall [Father] Davis getting involved in politics, but it was a “hot potato”!

Organizing Priests

Not only were the Mexican and Mexican-American communities of Central Texas organizing; the priests of Central Texas were also organizing themselves. Father Charles Campise remembers when Monsignor Lonnie Reyes was involving himself in the political scene of Austin and attempting to help the Hispanic community. As a result, Monsignor Reyes was reassigned to St. Louis Catholic Church, an English-speaking, middle-class parish in Waco. Father Campise recalls the event:

Bishop Reicher had censured [Monsignor Reyes] and was going to move him [to Waco]. We [priests] protested. Several of us marched and picketed in front of the church in our collars. Lay people were picketing, too. The man behind me was holding a sign that said, “Bishop Reicher is a bigot!” When the photo appeared in the newspaper, it looked like I was holding the sign!

Father Campise, who was now serving the Catholic community in Kyle, remembers the consequences: “[Bishop] Reicher stopped sending me the \$100 a month supplement for my salary!” Father Campise, like many other priests, was also very active in PADRES (the *Padres Asociados para los Derechos Religiosos, Educativos y Sociales* [Priests United for Religious, Educational & Social Rights]). He shares:

During my second year at Cristo Rey, PADRES got very active with the NCCB [National Conference of Catholic Bishops]. We were preparing an ultimatum for the USCC [United States Catholic Conference]. We demanded that worthy Mexican-American priests be elevated to bishoprics. If they didn’t do so within two years, we were going to secede [from the Roman Catholic Church] and start our own Mexican-American Catholic Church—with married clergy. We eventually took off the thing about married clergy, but the next year we took that ultimatum to the USCC.

A Stand-Off at Cristo Rey

Father Louis Pavlicek was the last priest to be ordained by Bishop Louis Reicher. Growing up west of Houston, he previously worked with Father Patrick Flores, the future Archbishop of San Antonio, at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Houston. For two months during his seminary studies, he also experienced rural village life in Mexico with the Maryknoll Lay Missioners. These experiences, he says, “really opened up my heart to Hispanic ministry.”

Now ordained a priest, Father Pavlicek’s first assignment was to serve as Associate Pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, beginning in 1971. Father Victor Goertz had departed from the parish in January, and his Associate Pastor, Father Dan Villanueva, was subsequently

named the parish's Administrator. Father Pavlicek remembers having recently arrived at Cristo Rey, when Father Villanueva had traveled to Houston, for a bit of time with friends from his ordination class. Father Pavlicek received a phone call from Father Joe Znotas, the pastor of Santa Julia Catholic Church. Father Znotas insisted, "I want to talk to [Father] Dan!" When Father Pavlicek explained that Father Villanueva was not present in the parish, Father Znotas demanded to know: "Is there a letter on his desk from Bishop Reicher?" After some insistence from the caller, Father Pavlicek confirmed that there was. "Open it," Father Znotas demanded. "I can't do that," Father Pavlicek replied. "Open the damned letter!", Father Znotas yelled. The letter confirmed Father Znotas' fear: Father Michael Kroll had been named pastor of Cristo Rey, and Fathers Villanueva and Pavlicek were named to assist him as associate pastors. A stand-off was already underway at Santa Julia Catholic Church: Father Ralph Brennan had been named to succeed Father Znotas as pastor of the parish community, and Father Znotas insisted he would not leave. A similar stand-off was soon to fall on Cristo Rey.

Father Pavlicek immediately called Father Villanueva, who immediately returned from Houston to Austin. Father Pavlicek explains, "There was a stand-off with Bishop Reicher. [Father] Dan would not allow [Father] Kroll to be pastor of Cristo Rey, and [Father] Znotas wouldn't leave Santa Julia." The Cristo Rey community, according to Father Pavlicek, was split: Some favored obedience to the bishop, while others supported Father Villanueva. The people of Santa Julia, he says, were more united in their support of their pastor. Parishioners of Cristo Rey and Santa Julia met to strategize their next steps.

Jesuit Father Edmundo Rodríguez, S.J. of the national organization of *Chicano* priests known as PADRES (the *Padres Asociados para los Derechos Religiosos, Educativos y Sociales* [Priests United for Religious, Educational & Social Rights]), was called to intervene in the stand-off with the bishop. Father Pavlicek recalls parishioners picketing outside the chancery and creating a media event around the matter. On some Sundays, he says, a collection was not taken up at the parish. He shares, "People said, 'We're not going to give any money to the church until the bishop backs off!'"

Father Victor Goertz explains that the situation was “complex and complicated.” As he flew back to Austin from a meeting in Chicago, he remembers being paged at the airport. The voice on the phone warned him, “Don’t come [to the chancery]. The chancery is being picketed by the folks of Cristo Rey!” Undaunted, Father Goertz drove to the chancery. “Jack Haley and I were going in to talk to [Bishop] Reicher, whom I felt sorry for,” he says. Once inside the bishop’s office, he recalls the bishop snarling, “[Those protesters] don’t even go to church!” Father Goertz calmly responded, “I just talked to Felice [Arocha] on my way in. She’s a daily communicant.” Bishop Reicher asked Father Goertz which priest he should name to be pastor of Cristo Rey. Father Goertz replied, “Name Villanueva. One, he’s there [at Cristo Rey]. Two, he’s *mexicano*.” The bishop, it seems, was not convinced.

In his 2005 book, *PADRES: The National Chicano Priest Movement*, Richard Edward Martínez suggests that Father Ralph Ruiz of PADRES then drove from San Antonio and stormed into Bishop Reicher’s office, stating that he would expose various rumors concerning the bishop’s use of church money for accumulating personal property, if the bishop didn’t back down and name Father Villanueva as the pastor of the parish. Interestingly, in the end, Father Villanueva was named Pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church.

Father Pavlicek remembers that as a young priest, now 31 years old, he was trying to “figure this thing out. It was an awakening [for me of the reality] of the world and the bishop and the people.” He believes that Father Edward Jordan and Father Don Chathan, the two priests who served as secretaries to Bishop Reicher and who intervened in various meetings at Cristo Rey and Santa Julia, convinced Bishop Reicher to retire that November. Bishop Vincent Harris had been named Coadjutor Bishop in January, but was not warmly welcomed by his predecessor. “Bishop Reicher didn’t want him there,” Father Pavlicek says. “Bishop Harris was given no office at the chancery. He simply stayed at his residence at St. Louis [King of France Catholic Church].” Bishop Reicher’s involvement in a lawsuit at the time only added to the confusion felt by the young priest. “Personally, it was a difficult summer,” he shares. “I was adjusting to the turmoil and chaos of Cristo Rey. [As a young priest,]

you have a certain idealism, and that idealism 'hit the road' with the situation I was in. I was forced to face the reality of Church politics."

Chapter Ten

“Much More American than Mexican” Cristo Rey Catholic Church in the 1970s and 1980s

“The church went down, really down.
Some went to other churches.”

Frances (Saucedo) Cuevas

“The working-class people
really started leaving [the neighborhood],
and that brought in the minorities.

There was a ‘White flight’ out of the neighborhood.”

Sabino “Pío” Rentería

“At the time, Cristo Rey was a very, very American parish,
much more American than Mexican,”

Socorro (García) Bernal

“Some [Mexican-Americans] try to forget they’re from Mexico.

La sangre es lo que trae uno de allá. ¿Cómo puede uno renegar eso?

[One’s very own blood comes from over there.

How can a person deny this part of who they are?]

Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles

The Pastorate of Father Dan Villanueva

Now that the conflict with Bishop Reicher had subsided, Father Dan Villanueva was serving as the first Mexican-American pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. He had previously served the parish community during the summer of 1967 and as associate pastor from 1969 to 1971.

Dolores “Dottie” Chapa remember that Father Villanueva came from a large family in the neighborhood. She says, “He was our first *mexicano* priest. All the other priests we had were White. He was

always trying to get people into the church, and he was a real good friend of my mom and dad."

When asked of their memories of Father Villanueva, many people hesitate, as if wondering how much to say and/or what polite words to use. With a note of scandal in his voice, Víctor Gómez remembers, "That little Father was terrible: He liked dancing!" His wife, Herminia (Escobar) Gómez, puts another spin on the memory: "He was a fun Father who wanted to participate with the people." Jesse Niño shares how the rumor used to circulate among his family and friends that Father Villanueva enjoyed dancing at *La Villita*, "where the old people used to go to dance." He shares, "They would always say, 'Do you know who was at *La Villita* last night? Father Villanueva!'" With his voice shifting from scandal to satisfaction, Jesse says, "He used to dance with my aunt!" Various parishioners still recall how Father Villanueva also enjoyed drinking. Amelia (Vallejo) Pérez describes him as "a jokester who liked to drink." Her son, Víctor Pérez, notes that he was a "sharp-looking man" who was "active with the kids." Francisco Rodríguez says, "*Le gustó mucho la cerveza* [He really liked beer]," to which his wife, Janie (Alemán) Rodríguez, adds, "Sometimes he was [at the parish], sometimes he wasn't." Father Albert Ruiz, who served as associate pastor at the time, confirms, "Sometimes he didn't show up for Mass, and we had to bail him out from time to time. Once, I had to take him to San Marcos because he couldn't remember where he left his car." One parishioner remembers that Father Villanueva ended the years-long tradition of praying the rosary every night during the month of May. According to Frances (Saucedo) Cuevas and her son, Louis Cuevas, however, Father Villanueva was not completely averse to praying the rosary. They share the following painful story:



Fr. Dan Villanueva.

Frances: A lot of people stayed away from Cristo Rey at that time. [A long, awkward silence follows.]

Louis: My grandmother [Concepción Cuevas] passed away. [Louis pauses to fight back tears.] He came and did the rosary before the burial. He approached my uncle, Andrew, who was looking after her affairs, and demanded money for the rosary. [Louis is hardly able to speak.] That was really upsetting to me. I wrote him a nasty letter, telling him how I felt. He never responded.

Frances: The church went down, really down. Some went to other churches. He was always on the street with young girls, having a good time.

Francisco “Frank” Granado lives across the street from the Cuevas family on the 2600 block of East Third Street. He describes Father Villanueva as “the Spanish priest with the girlfriend across the street.” He looks out his window and points out the house that the priest would visit twice a day.



Cristo Rey Catholic Church, 1972.

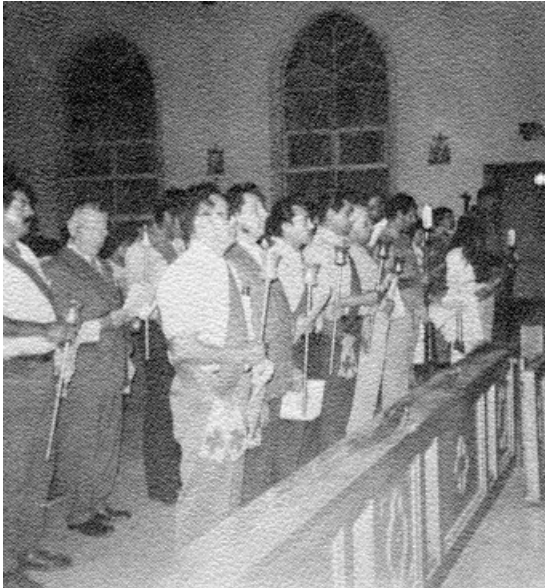
To his credit, it was during Father Villanueva’s pastorate that the 1972 history of Cristo Rey Catholic Church was written. Many copies still survive of the 60-page work, which was the sole document of parish history produced during the parish’s first fifty years. Father Louis Pavlicek, who served as Father Villanueva’s associate pastor, possesses positive memories as well, saying that Father Villanueva’s “leadership style was more intellectual than organized. He was spontaneous and a good teacher. He was good at catechesis.”



Cristo Rey Catholic Church, 1972.

Villanueva's interest in teaching and catechesis was likely reflected in his decisions to continue such outstanding parish projects as the Cristo Rey Liturgical Center and the Cristo Rey Montessori School. Another very catechetical moment is described in detail in the parish's (1972) history. Due to its inclusion in the parish's history book, some memory survives of the "All Hallows' Eve" celebration on October 31, 1972. According to the parish history, the event was "celebrated in an attempt to provide a learning experience for the children, in order that they might know about the Christian heroes who passed the faith and their example of Christian life down to us." The following description survives of the event that was attended by some 450 to 500 people:

Twelve men carrying torches led the procession through the neighborhood as the Litany of the Saints was sung. Children wearing placards bearing the names of saints were walking reminders of the Christian heroes of history. The "Saints procession" ended on the church grounds, where it had begun. By the light of a blazing bonfire, everyone prayed for the dead. "Soul cakes" and sweets were blessed.



Torch-bearing men during the All Hallows' Eve celebration at Cristo Rey Catholic Church, 1972.

Memories of Father Louis Pavlicek

At Cristo Rey, Father Pavlicek found the people to be “receptive and loving,” despite his limitations in speaking Spanish. He remembers that 50-60% of the phone calls that came to the parish were from Spanish-speaking persons, and that a similar mix of English and Spanish characterized parish meetings. For a few summers, he would travel to the Mexican-American Cultural Center in San Antonio for three weeks at a time, to study the Spanish language. From a parishioner’s perspective, Socorro (García) Bernal recalls that Father Pavlicek spoke Spanish very well, had a great love for the Mexican people, and was very welcoming to all.

Father Pavlicek was responsible for bringing to the United States the image of Christ the King that adorns the church’s sanctuary. He remembers that Francisca “Frances,” María “Mary” and María Alicia “Mary Alice” Ramírez wanted to acquire a statue of the church’s patron, in memory of their father, Inés Ramírez. Father Pavlicek traveled with them to Guadalajara, Jalisco, where they commissioned an artist to fashion the image. Six to eight months later, Father Pavlicek drove his Volvo station wagon to Guadalajara to fetch the completed image. He recalls he had no problem crossing into the U.S. with the image, once he convinced Mexico officials that he was not removing a historical artifact from the country.

Father Pavlicek especially enjoyed being involved with the high school students of the parish. He also remembers how the newly-appointed Hispanic principals of the three local elementary schools within the parish’s boundaries (viz., Zavala, Metz and Brooke) came to the parish suggesting they partner to reinforce the children’s Hispanic culture by organizing a neighborhood *posada*. “There were hundreds of kids marching down the streets with candles,” Father Pavlicek recalls. The schools also hosted a *dieciséis de septiembre* celebration, in which the children reenacted Father Miguel Hidalgo’s call for the independence of Mexico. “A kid was dressed as a priest, with a cassock, in a public school,” Father Pavlicek remembers. “It was a historical presentation with a priest in the primary role. You wouldn’t see that today!”

After three years at Cristo Rey, Father Pavlicek recalls being especially moved by the farewell reception offered him in 1974. He remembers,

When it came time for me to leave, my family came for the *despedida* [farewell]. The [parish] hall was packed, they had a *mariachi*, and the people showed their appreciation. I was really touched by the event, and how the people had welcomed me.

Reflecting on his first priestly assignment, he shares, “Your first parish becomes your first love. You’re a new priest, and how [the people of the parish] accept you is very important.”

Frustration with the Austin Police Department

During the early 1970s, tension was mounting among the Mexican-American community with respect to the treatment they felt they were receiving from officers of the Austin Police Department. “[The police] would just treat you real badly,” says Sabino “Pío” Rentería. He continues,

I would go down Navasota [Street], and the cops would yell, “Hey, wetback!” Back then, the police were really brutal. They would just kill. People would mysteriously get run over by a train or hang themselves when they were let go from jail. Every time there was a killing by police, we’d go and do a big demonstration and let people know we were keeping an eye on [the police].

He remembers that one such demonstration occurred behind Johnny Boy’s, a hamburger stand at 2401 East First Street, where Austin police officers shot and killed a man who had reported his son to the police department.

Eulalio “Edward” Rendón, Sr. remembers, “*La ley de aquí de Austin no quería a los mexicanos* [The law enforcement officials of Austin didn’t like Mexicans]”. He tells stories of how police officers beat various community members, including Paul Hernández. He readily shares stories of protests and efforts to educate the community about their rights. Father Ruiz similarly remembers the situation in lower East Austin during his service to the parish (1974-1975). He notes, “All these riots began to happen in Austin. If policemen went into the neighborhoods, [the people] would throw bricks [at them].”

The Centro Chicano

As a result of the need to organize the Mexican-American community, the *Centro Chicano* was established in 1971 on San Marcos Street. Sabino “Pío” Rentería enumerates some of the problems the center was formed to combat. “We had a lot of problems: Paint and glue sniffing by neighborhood kids, police harassment. We also had a hotline for domestic problems. We were doing all these programs – without getting paid.”

The volunteers of the *Centro Chicano* began to film incidents of police brutality. Sabino “Pío” Rentería shares,

We were fighting discrimination and harassment, so we bought a video camera—it was very expensive—and we would follow APD [officers] with recorders. [When we received a call,] we’d hop into the car and investigate. That really upset them.”

The *Centro Chicano* also assisted neighborhood residents with rent and utility payments. The organization operated out of a variety of facilities, including *El Buen Pastor* Presbyterian Church, a facility at 1200 Willow Street, and an office at the Quintanilla House at 1402 East First Street. Sabino recalls that various problems plagued the organization, including the disappearance of various funds, so that the organization was short-lived.

The Brown Berets

The Brown Berets were a paramilitary group organized as part of the *Chicano* movement of the late 1960s to combat police brutality. Richard Rendón shares some of the things that he learned from the organization that began in Crystal City with the goal of educating the community:

We didn’t know anything [about Texas history], just that the Mexicans were *bandidos* [bandits], and that an Anglo, Davey Crockett, killed hundreds of them on his own. We didn’t know Colonel Seguí and the other Mexicans who fought against Santa Ana. We didn’t know that *mexicanos* were in World War I and World War II and Vietnam. [We thought] we were supposed to be laborers!

Brown Beret Sabino “Pío” Rentería recalls that it was his sister, Susana (Rentería) Almanza, and Ernesto Fraga of Waco who brought the Brown Berets to Austin, and that they later selected Paul Hernández to be their spokesperson. Sabino summarizes the mission of the Brown Berets: “[They] were not political. They wanted their own revolution. They were going to secede from the U.S.—something we shared with [Governor Rick] Perry—and call Texas ‘Atzlán.’”

Sabino suggests that there were as many as 40 Brown Berets in Austin at the height of the movement. They dressed in their characteristic khaki, paramilitary uniforms and the brown berets which were the symbol of the resistance to racism. He would later leave the organization because, as his (Anglo) wife, Lori, says, “They made Sabino turn in his Brown Beret uniform for loving me. They said they needed to keep their blood pure.”

Father Charles Campise admits that he encouraged the radical behavior of the Brown Berets. He shares:

I was peripherally involved in the Brown Berets, encouraging them to protest. I guess I can talk about it so many years later. They were part of the dynamic within the Hispanic community: There was a small cadre of Hispanic leaders who were pacifists, and there were the Brown Berets. [The Brown Berets] were irritants. They led protests and marches and picketing. They went before City Council, and they raised hell, dressed in their brown berets and paramilitary uniforms. The White establishment would say, “We can’t stand these Brown Berets!” And the pacifists



Future Austin City Council Member Sabino “Pío” Rentería as a member of the Brown Berets.

would say, “We know how to get the Brown Berets to back off: Let’s talk about how to improve the Hispanic community!” The Brown Berets definitely got the attention of the White establishment.

Santo Julio “Buddy” Ruiz offers a differing view of the Brown Berets. He says,

The Brown Berets were a wonderful little spark in this fire that was blazing, but they were only a spark. They were critical in community organizing, but my worry was always that they were so young. When you’re young, you tend to do things for which you pay a price larger than what you gain. I knew [that] some of the things they were going to do would be openly confrontational with the police. I didn’t want any part of that.

The Brown Berets were particularly visible during the 1974 “March for Justice to End Police Terror” and during the 1977 protests of the “Austin Aqua Fest” boat races on Town Lake. They were also present in 1983 when the building that formerly housed Lincoln-Juárez University (1971-1979) at 715 East First Street (on the site of the present-day IHOP Restaurant) was slated to be demolished. The images painted on the building were a symbol of *Chicano* pride, so the Brown Berets stood guard over them. Father Albert Ruiz confesses, “There’s a video of me somewhere. [In the video], I’m at the corner of what used to be [Lincoln-Juárez University]...They wanted to tear the building down, and I was praying the rosary.” Father Ruiz shares that he was a friend of several members of the Brown Berets. He says, “I was friends of Paul Hernández and all of them, [and we were] boycotting what was going on in the neighborhood and with the police.”

Memories of Father Albert Ruiz

In 1973, the newly-ordained Father Albert Ruiz was assigned to assist the spiritual needs of the Cristo Rey community as the parish’s Associate Pastor. For the first year of his assignment, he remembers assisting Father Villanueva and Father Pavlicek with the spiritual needs of the communities of Euland and Martindale, as well as the

young men and women of the Gary Job Corps in San Marcos. At that time, former Cristo Rey Associate Pastor Father Charles Campise was the pastor of St. Anthony of Claret Catholic Church in Kyle, and was responsible for those communities. For one year, the three priests at Cristo Rey served not only their own community, but also rotated on weekends so as to be able to assist Father Campise with the spiritual needs of the communities under his care.

During Father Ruiz's first year at Cristo Rey, Sandi Yonikus directed the parish's Montessori school, but the parish had no formal religious education program. When Sandi departed from the parish community after his first year, Father Albert remembers, "We began a religious education program and got people involved."



Sandi Yonikus & children of the Cristo Rey Montessori School.

Father Ruiz also noticed that the parish had no programs for high school students. Father Ruiz remembers, "Kids would come around, so we started meeting. I used my ordination money to take them to Holiday House on Barton Springs for Coke™ and French fries. There were fifteen to twenty kids. It was at that time that we began the CYO." For those aware of the parish's history, the CYO existed at Cristo Rey since the 1950s. Apparently, though, activity by young people in the parish had died down since the tremendously popular "Go-Go Series" of the early 1960s.

A Dangerous Neighborhood, Still?

Father Ruiz states that he will never forget his first day at the parish in 1973. He summarizes, "I was almost killed my first day at Cristo Rey!" Having moved into the rectory, Father Ruiz found himself alone at the house that evening. He shares the story in his own words:

Someone knocked on the back door. It was night. I was stupid and young, and I opened the door wide. A man was standing there. He had been drinking. His hand was in his pocket, and I could see it was probably a gun or a knife. He said he was angry at the cops. He said, 'I'm going to kill someone tonight.' I began to talk to him, but he wouldn't budge. After ten minutes, he took his hand out of his pocket and opened a [switchblade] knife. I froze. The blood ran out of my head.

After slowly moving the knife, then his fist, in front of Father Ruiz's face, the man asked, "Are you a priest?" Father Ruiz signaled that he was, and the man said, "Good night." On another occasion, Father Ruiz remembers, "A drunken guy tried to beat me up one night when I was locking the church!"

A Neighborhood Immersed in *Curanderismo*

Father Ruiz also recalls the strong influence of *curanderismo*, a form of shamanism popular among various Mexican and Mexican-American persons, particularly those interested in minimizing the influence of "evil spirits" and/or in avenging wrongs. Due to the influence of *curanderismo* in the neighborhood, Father Ruiz recalls how he went to the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio to participate in various three-week summer courses on the theme of *curanderismo*. He comments, "I grew up with [*curanderismo*]. But at Cristo Rey, all these horrible things were happening." As an instance of this, he shares the story of one day walking into the church's Blessed Sacrament Chapel for the morning Mass. An awful smell tipped him off to the presence of a phallic symbol fashioned from feces and pierced with various safety pins. Based on such experiences and his studies at the Mexican American Cultural Center, Father Ruiz was called upon to teach doctors and nurses about *curanderismo*. He says, "You don't hear much about [*curanderismo*] any more, but in 1973, it was a big deal." He remembers that *El Porvenir*,

a bakery, grocery store and *yerbería* on Santa Rita Street, was the center of *curanderismo* in the neighborhood. Cecilia Mendoza remembers growing up across the street from *El Porvenir*. She says, “We didn’t know anything about *curanderismo*, but the store had white candles and black candles and bracelets that children wore to protect themselves from *mal de ojo* [bad luck purportedly caused by the ill-wishing glare of another].”

Memories of Father Xavier Guttenberger

A few memories still exist of a Father Xavier S. Guttenberger, a visiting priest who assisted with the spiritual needs of the Cristo Rey community from 1974-1976. Though not an Associate Pastor at Cristo Rey, Father Guttenberger came to celebrate various liturgies at Cristo Rey. A native of Germany, Father Guttenberger had previously served as a missionary in Chile for some forty years. He came to Austin to live with his niece, who was completing her graduate studies in mathematics at The University of Texas at Austin.

A New Noise in the Neighborhood:

The Holly Street Power Plant

During these years (1960-1974), the Holly Power Plant was being constructed five blocks south of the church. At first, neighbors were unaware of what was happening. They saw a train track being built in the neighborhood, and they wondered where it went. Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles recounts:

They built the dam [Longhorn Dam] and they put railroad tracks on Pedernales, and people were wondering why there were railroad tracks there. The rumor was that [the tracks] were to deliver coal, [and] that they were going to build a power plant.

A power plant was indeed built, thus changing the neighborhood for the next thirty years. Sabino “Pío” Rentería explains that the Holly Street Power Plant generated a constant “low rumble—like at the ocean.” Little league coaches on the adjacent baseball fields struggled to communicate with young athletes over the noise. The rumble was punctuated three times a day by a great release of steam. Sabino says, “[Plant managers] were really insensitive. They did it whenever they

needed to." As a result, Sabino says, "the working-class people really started leaving [the neighborhood], and that brought in the minorities. There was a 'White flight' out of the neighborhood."

Citing the research of various scholars, Tretter and Adams (2011) note that "areas throughout the United States where non-White communities are or have been segregated have higher rates of exposure to air toxins, waste sites, and other artificial environmental hazards than White areas." This seems to be the case with the construction of the Holly Power Plant among the minority populations of East Austin. Sabino points out that the Brown Berets, of which he was part, labeled the construction of the power plant an act of "environmental racism." He recalls John Moore later admitting at a decommissioning meeting, "Before we start this meeting, I want to admit that putting the power plant here was a racist act." Sabino notes that John implemented various changes at the plant that eased neighborhood tensions: sound-buffer walls were erected, outdoor loudspeakers were no longer used for power plant employees, and the power plant staff "hired gang kids to paint murals" on various walls.

Santo "Buddy" Ruiz lists the complaints of neighborhood residents concerning the power plant: "The plant makes noise. It likely puts out pollution. It creates traffic in the neighborhood, with trucks coming in and out. It makes noise, and it causes vibrations. How do you measure that?" As a result of living beside the plant, Lela E. (Cruz) Castro says that her husband "got a habitual cough that wouldn't quit," and that Loma Jo Richardson also "died of a cough." Four years after the plant closed down, she still points to her home: "Our house is proof of what comes off the Holly Power Plant. Look at the soot. You can see what people breathed." Lori (Cervenak) Rentería uses stronger language, noting that "kids were born deformed!" Her husband, Sabino "Pío" Rentería explains, "PCB was an ingredient used in the transformers. When transformers popped, they leaked into Town Lake, and poor people were eating polluted fish." The City of Austin issued a study of the issues and found no evidence to support any complaint beyond noise and traffic. "No one brought up [issues of] explosions or accidents," Santo "Buddy" Ruiz says.

Lela E. (Cruz) Castro, who lived beside the plant at 2221 Holly Street, remembers that there was one such accident at the power plant:

There was an excruciating noise. I started screaming at my husband, [saying,] “Sonny, hurry! Let’s get out of here! Something’s happening!” A policeman who heard it, [later] said, “I thought a plane had come into the Holly Power Plant!” An Anglo [man] on the bike trail was white as a sheet. He said, “I was on the hike-and-bike trail, and all this stuff started sprinkling on me and all the children!” And all the children ran into Metz [Elementary School] screaming.

Lela says that the fire or explosion was caused by human error. After 33 years of operation and decades of neighborhood activism focused on closing the facility, the Holly Street Power Plant would later shut down in September 2007.

Memories of Father John Driscoll

In 1975, Father John Driscoll was assigned to serve as Pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. A native of Boston, Father Driscoll served the community for four years. Father Kirby Garner, who later ministered with Father Driscoll at Saint Anthony Catholic Church in Bryan, recalls, “He was a nice guy, but he would never stay longer than six years in a place. He’d always say [that within six years], “I’ve said and done all I can.”

Father Driscoll is known for having invited the Holy Cross Sisters to minister at Cristo Rey Catholic Church. These Sisters were known in particular for their community outreach and social ministry. They are also credited with beginning the parish’s first prayer group in Spanish, which existed prior to 1977. For Spanish-speaking support, the prayer group turned to Father Pedro Montes, the associate pastor at Santa Julia Catholic Church, who was from Oaxaca, Mexico.



Fr. John Driscoll.

Juanita (Bazán) López shares that it was Father Driscoll who first helped her feel at home at Cristo Rey. She had visited Dolores, Santa Julia and Our Lady of Guadalupe Parishes, but did not feel at home at any. Then, she says, “*Iba para mis visitas a Cristo Rey, y me confesaba con él.* [I would visit Cristo Rey and go to confession with him]” Soon, she found herself getting involved in the parish community.



Fr. Driscoll with Felice Arocha & Olivia Valdez.

Richard Rendón says, “Father Driscoll gave me my first book!” He also credits Father Driscoll with getting him involved in the parish. As a result of Father Driscoll’s invitation, Richard assisted the St. Vincent de Paul Society and coached *Los Únicos de Cristo Rey* [the Unique Ones of Cristo Rey], a parish softball team comprised of “boys from the streets.”

Father Kirby Garner also recalls that Father Driscoll had a sense of humor. He shares a story that Father Driscoll enjoyed telling:

They were getting ready for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and [those who were decorating the church] were hanging an antependium on the altar with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. María Ramírez came into the church and [noting that there was now a second image of the saint in the church] quipped, “So which Our Lady of Guadalupe are we supposed to adore? It seems the right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing.” Responding with humor in the face of cynicism, [Father] Driscoll raised his hands and said, “This is my right hand, and this is my left hand. And yes, the right hand knows what the left is doing!”

Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles also remembers an anecdote concerning Father Driscoll and Our Lady of Guadalupe. At some point between 1975 and 1979, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe

that the Mireles family had donated to the church in 1959 was stolen. Guadalupe shares the story:

A man took it down and [stole] it. It was heavy. He was walking on Robert Martínez [Street], near Holly. A woman [from the parish] recognized it and asked him, "How much do you want for it?" He said, "Five dollars." After she "bought" it, she called Father Driscoll and asked, "Are you missing something?" From that day on, Father Driscoll began to lock the church during the day.

Father Driscoll was assisted by various associate pastors, including Father Albert Cerezo, MRY (1976-1977), Father Steve Montenegro (1976-1977), Father Leon Strieder (1977-1978) and Father John Alan McCaffrey (1979-1982). Among those interviewed for this work, no memory exists of Father Cerezo. Father Frank Briganti remembers that Father Montenegro was previously invited by Father Victor Goertz to preach a parish Lenten mission at Cristo Rey during the late 1950s or early 1960s. "He was a Spaniard and a tough guy to live with," Father Briganti says. "He had a basic 'don't sin' theology."

One year after being ordained in 1976, Father Leon Strieder served the parish for a single year while chairing the diocese's first Liturgical Commission. Victor Pérez remembers Father Strieder allowing him to accompany at age 8 a field trip of altar servers to San Antonio. "You had to be 13 [years old] to be an altar server," he says, "so they all towered over me!"

Father John Alan McCaffrey's first three years of priestly ministry were at Cristo Rey. Socorro (García) Bernal recalls how Father McCaffrey planted in her mind the idea of one day serving as a lector. In Mexico, she was accustomed to seeing lectors being chosen for the Mass only minutes before the service would begin. In the U.S., however, she noted how schedules controlled such tasks. She was thus surprised when Father McCaffrey one day, before Mass was



*Fr. John McCaffrey
with a boy at Cristo Rey.*

about to begin, invited her to proclaim the Word of God. "I was very nervous," she recalls, "but he assured me I could do it." Francisco Rodríguez remembers that after he would help around the church, Father McCaffrey would invite him out for a special treat: double-meat hamburgers.

"Church-shopping" in 1975

Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse remembers moving to Austin in 1974 and "shopping" for a church the following year. "Cristo Rey was the place I felt at home, the place where I felt the Spirit." She confesses, "For many years, I just attended Sunday Mass: I would sneak in and sneak out and wasn't involved at all." It would take some 15 years for her to involve herself in the parish, assisting the needs of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and their religious education programs.

A Parish Divided

Socorro (García) Bernal recalls the divide that existed in the late 1970s between the *Tejano* (Mexican American) and recently-arrived (Mexican) communities of the parish. "At the time, Cristo Rey was a very, very American parish, much more American than Mexican," she says. "Everything was American, and the Mexican Americans controlled the parish." A native of Tamaulipas, Mexico, Socorro felt warmly welcomed to the parish by Juanita Sánchez, a charismatic young woman from Coahuila, Mexico. Juanita invited Socorro to a meeting of the Altar and Rosary Society, which was comprised primarily of Mexican American women. Wanting to better know the Mexican American community of the parish, Socorro obliged. She recalls, "I felt rejected by [the women of that ministry], and I began to see the differences between the two communities."

As an example of how "American" the parish was in the 1970s, for instance, neither the pastor, Father Driscoll, nor his associate pastor, Father McCaffrey, spoke Spanish. Socorro remembers, "I had just arrived, and I didn't speak any English. And they didn't speak a word of Spanish. They would simply read the Mass [in Spanish]." Socorro suspects that the bishop at that time, Bishop Vincent Harris, did not have a great understanding and/or interest in the Spanish-speaking community of Austin. It is also possible that the children and

grandchildren of the *mexicanos* who first came to Austin so many decades before were now inculturated into the predominantly English-speaking culture of the United States.

To this day, Socorro feels great compassion for those persons who come from Mexico and are confused by the American Catholic system of “registering” with a parish and of using envelopes for one’s charitable giving to the church. She shares, “When I came [to the U.S.], I didn’t know you had to register. And I didn’t know how to use envelopes. Then, I would forget to take my envelopes to Mass, and I would just place the money in the basket—until one day when I received a letter in the mail saying that I owed a certain amount of money to the parish. I was putting my money in the basket, not in an envelope!”

During the late 1970s, it became clear that two very distinct communities were emerging within the same parish—a more recently arrived, Spanish-speaking community and a more established and inculturated, English-speaking community. Many people of both communities were unable to communicate in the other language and/or understand the experiences of the other community. A competitive, “us-versus-them” model was quickly emerging. Until the mid-1980s, this would favor the Mexican-American community. In the meantime, resentment toward the recently-arrived was beginning to build within the Mexican-American community. A native of Buda, Eulalio “Edward” Rendón, Sr. offers one concrete example of the origins of such tension. He says,

There’s a big difference between Mexican-Americans and Mexicans. They [i.e., recently-arrived Mexicans] began to take the jobs that we [Mexican-Americans] used to have. [In 1984, at age 58,] I had to retire [as a stone mason] because the Mexicans were coming and charging less. I have nothing against them, except that they’re illegal and they try to take over *todo* [everything]. They could offer lower prices because they didn’t pay taxes or insurance. They made the entire dollar, [whereas] I had to pay \$5,500 a year for my workers’ insurance!

The U.S.-born son of Mexican immigrants, Guadalupe “Lupe” Mireles doesn’t believe the differences are so great between the two

communities, except that Mexican-Americans often attempt to deny their Mexican ancestry. He says, "Some of them [Mexican-Americans] try to forget they're from Mexico. *La sangre es lo que trae uno de allá. ¿Cómo puede uno renegar eso?* [One's very own blood comes from over there. How can a person deny this part of who they are?]"

Another New Noise in the Neighborhood:

Boat Races on Town Lake

For nine years during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the annual Austin Aqua Fest on Town Lake drew crowds of up to 5,000 people to East Austin. Sabino "Pío" Rentería says, "[The boat races] started at 7:00 a.m., and they would wake up everyone in the neighborhood. And it would get pretty ugly, with a lot of fights and rowdy kids throwing beer bottles and leaving trash. So the community organized to move them. The boat races really got the neighborhood active."

Eulalio "Edward" Rendon, Sr. recalls that those who came to the races were "*pueros americanos*" [only Anglos], and that they parked all over. He says, "*Era todo parqueadero y estábamos fastidiados con el ruido todo el día el viernes, sábado y domingo* [The entire neighborhood was a parking lot, and we were fed up with the noise all day every Friday, Saturday and Sunday]."

The Mexican-American community hosted demonstrations against the boat races, which were typically peaceful. "[Protesters] were sitting and lying on the street, hand-in-hand," he says. He describes one day in which the demonstration turned violent:

All the people were in the street, protesting. An *americano* in a car was running over people. He hurt five or so, and they had to go to the hospital. The Mexicans flipped his car, with him inside! The police arrived and beat a woman, Señora [Adela] Mancías. She was pregnant. Paul [Hernández] got involved, and they beat him, too.

Some elders in the community still remember the exasperation they felt at having these boat races imposed on them and their neighborhood – and of the violent clashes with police that resulted.

Organizing Neighborhood Associations

The oppression of the Mexican American community of East Austin endured during the late 1970s. Those who wanted to secure bank loans to remodel their homes were told that their properties were “red-lined,” and that they would only be lent money if the purpose was to demolish their homes and build warehouses on the land, which was now zoned “industrial.” Some such people were directed to Paul Hernández of the Austin Tenant Council on East First Street. Paul encouraged people to speak with their neighbors about their desires. As a result, *Barrio Unido* was formed in 1979. *Barrio Unido* was the second neighborhood association to be birthed in Hispanic East Austin. The first was the East Town Lake Citizens, which was created in 1977 by Marcos DeLeón, Paul Hernández and Gavino Fernández, Jr. to combat the speedboat races on Town Lake.

Eulalio “Edward” Rendón, Sr. says that he was the only Mexican in the East Town Lake Citizens. He says, “*Todos eran méxico-americanos, nacidos aquí* [All the rest were Mexican-Americans, born here].” Eulalio served as president of the organization from 1978 to 1982. At the same time, he regularly assisted his wife, Concepción “Connie” (Martínez) Rendón, with a Sunday breakfast group at Cristo Rey Catholic Church.

Lori (Cervenak) Rentería notes that various neighborhood associations were forming throughout Austin during the late 1970s. She says, “Neighborhood people were taking on social issues. Neighborhood associations were forming all over Austin, lobbying City Council for improvements in their neighborhoods.” Her husband, Sabino, notes that many neighborhood associations in East Austin, however, “weren’t very smart about politics: They were taking on the establishment, trying to overthrow the Mexican-American democrats, rather than take on neighborhood issues.”

Sabino and Lori belonged to the East Town Lake Citizens. The following conversation highlights their disenchantment with the group:

Lori: We were all members of the East Town Lake Citizens, but there were only certain women [who were] allowed into certain political decisions. We [women] were just supposed to be “working bees” and “body counts.”

Sabino: White girls [like my wife] weren't allowed.

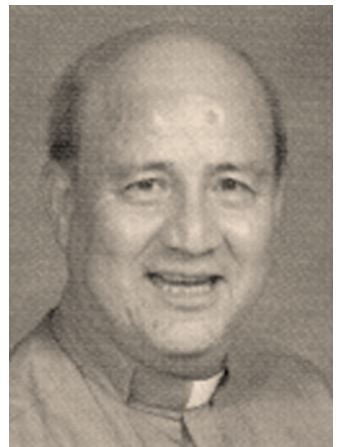
Lori: They would hold meetings at my home and tell me I had to leave. Wives and girlfriends and spouses were not allowed to participate!

Lori says that, as a result, the women formed their own organization, *Las Mujeres de East Austin* [The Women of East Austin], which focused on "child care, affordable housing and issues that mattered to us." Lori notes that the male leadership of the East Town Lake Citizens was not pleased. She says, "They were so pissed off with us. Marcos [DeLeón] told us, 'You are not allowed to form your own women's group in this neighborhood. You can be a women's auxiliary of [our association].'" The women were not deterred. They formed a Campfire group for young girls and the East Austin Youth Club. Later, in 1984, they endorsed a *Latina*, Lena Guerrero, for political office, thus causing the men to react by fielding their own candidate, Paul Hernández. Lena won the race and became the second female Hispanic to be elected to the Texas legislature. A year later, those who broke away from the East Town Lake Citizens formed the United East Austin Coalition.

The Chancellor as Pastor:

A Lacuna in Parish History

After ten years of serving as priest, Monsignor Longinus Juventius "Lonnie" Reyes was named pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in 1979. During the next four years of his pastorate, he would also serve as the Chancellor of the Diocese of Austin (1975-1986) under Bishop Vincent Harris.



Monsignor Lonnie Reyes.

In 1981, Monsignor Reyes invited the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (a.k.a., the Salesian Sisters) to minister at Cristo Rey Catholic Church. The first two Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Sister Theresa Murillo, F.M.A. and Sister María Becerril, F.M.A. arrived in Austin on August



Monsignor Lonnie Reyes (right) & his brother, Fr. Leopoldo Reyes of Santa Julia, welcoming Sr. Theresa Murillo & María Becerril to Austin, 1981.

15, 1981. Sister Theresa served as Director of Religious Education at Cristo Rey Catholic Church, and Sister María served as Director of Religious Education at Santa Julia Catholic Church. The Sisters assisted one another in preparing for the start of a new year of religious education classes. Sister María remembers, "There was

much disorder in the classrooms. Things were dirty. Papers were all over. I helped Sister Theresa here [at Cristo Rey], and then she went to Santa Julia to help me." After one year, Sister Socorro Ortega joined their local community, assisting at Santa Julia on Saturdays and at Cristo Rey on Sundays. At that time, the sisters lived in the "casa blanca" (white house) on the northeast corner of East Second and Canadian (present-day Robert Martínez, Jr.) Streets.



The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians outside their convent, 1982.

Father Pedro García Ramírez describes Monsignor Reyes as "a good priest, with a good sense of humor and dedicated to his parish: [he was] a good pastor, and people loved him." Father García Ramírez says that Monsignor Reyes "insisted that the parish belonged to all families."

Likely due to factors related to his sudden departure from Santa Julia Catholic Church in 2004, Monsignor Reyes turned down repeated requests to be interviewed for the present work, such that very little is known at present of his contribution to the parish community. Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse refers to him as a “skipping rock on a lake” at Cristo Rey.

Louis Cuevas possesses not-so-fond memories of Monsignor Reyes, who often sided with and publicly supported certain candidates for political office, even holding campaign fundraisers on Cristo Rey property. “I was supporting my friend, Lee Polanco, for office. We went to Johnston together, and I printed all his campaign materials – but we felt we were fighting the political machinery of East Austin, which had Lonnie Reyes in its back pocket.”

Dolores “Dottie” Chapa affirms:

Monsignor Reyes was a priest who liked to be in the *política*. He was always pulling for people who were running for some type of office in Austin. He was nice, but at every Mass he had to bring something up about someone running for something in the City of Austin.

Monsignor Reyes was assisted by various associate pastors, including his brother, Father Leopoldo Reyes (1979-1981), Deacon Florencio Rodríguez (1981), and Father Howard Heathcote (1982). Very few memories exist of Father Leopoldo. Juanita (Bazán) López says, “he was very different from his brother, but he did everything his brother said.” Socorro (García) Bernal recalls that, though the Reyes brothers were Mexican-American, they were more fluent in English than in Spanish and would answer Spanish-speaking persons in English.

Socorro (García) Bernal remembers that Deacon Rodríguez “was very ‘Mexican’ and spoke excellent Spanish, even though he was a Mexican American. He did a lot for the Mexicans, and he had good sermons. I liked them.” Her brother, Father Pedro García Ramírez, adds, “He had a good sense of humor. In his homilies, he would speak of *comadres* and *telenovelas* [fictive kin and soap operas]. The people loved him, and my sisters were enchanted with him.” Juanita (Bazán) López adds, “He was very good at explaining things: parts of the

Mass, policies, how to dress for the Mass, and how to receive Communion.”

Father Pedro García Ramírez remembers that Father Howard was a young and outgoing diocesan priest. Socorro (García) Bernal recalls how Father Howard did not speak any Spanish. Like several other priests at Cristo Rey, he could, however, manage to read the Mass in Spanish. Father García Ramírez also remembers another anecdote from the days in which Father García worked on the maintenance staff at Cristo Rey:

In the parish center, there was a showcase with many old trophies. I was painting the parish center, so Father Howard gave me the keys to the showcase and told me to throw the trophies out. When the women of the parish found out what I had done, they began a riot!

A Member of the Cristo Rey Maintenance Staff Joins the Seminary

A native of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Father Pedro García Ramírez enrolled in a minor seminary in Matamoros at age 11. Shortly thereafter, a bout with appendicitis forced him to abandon his studies. As a young man, he participated in the *Jornada Juvenil* movement. Socorro (García) Bernal recalls that she worked through the mail to secure the necessary documents for her brother to come to the United States in 1976. After arriving in Austin, he lived in the small apartment behind Socorro’s home.

Father García recalls that his involvement at Cristo Rey was limited at the time. He remembers studying English with Maureen Dillon, a native of Redford, Michigan and a student at Saint Edward’s University. Maureen volunteered her time teaching English classes in the parish’s facility at 2201 East 2½ Street. He involved himself in the parish’s Catholic Youth Organization and remembers playing soccer in the yard beside the church’s *escuelita*.

At 26 years old, the future Father García was invited by Father Lonnie Reyes to be part of the parish’s maintenance staff. During his three years of service in this capacity, he remembers painting the *escuelita*, the rectory, the parish center, and even the church. He balanced his work at Cristo Rey with other jobs at a car wash on Oltorf

Street, Foley's at Highland Mall, and the Holiday House on Barton Springs.

Father García recalls being inspired by Monsignor Reyes' pastoral concern for Father García's mother, who passed away in 1981. The Cristo Rey pastor visited her at Holy Cross Hospital (on 19th Street), taking her Communion and hearing her confession.

When García subsequently began feeling an inclination toward the priesthood, he approached Associate Pastor John McCaffrey, who also served as the vocation director for the diocese. He remembers, "[Father] John McCaffrey didn't speak Spanish, and I didn't speak English. When I said I wanted to enter the seminary, he said I had to speak with Monsignor [Reyes, who spoke Spanish]." Father García recalls that Monsignor Reyes invited him to reside at the parish rectory for four months, so as to see how the priesthood is lived, and paid for him to attend a six-week English course at the Mexican-American Cultural Center in San Antonio. When Monsignor Reyes was transferred to Santa Julia Catholic Church in 1983, Pedro went to stay there for one month as he finished his GED preparation with Monsignor Reyes' sister, Lucy. In the Fall of 1982, Pedro entered the seminary.

In 1989, Pedro returned to Cristo Rey for ten weeks. He resided in the parish's property at 2201 East 2½ Street while completing a ten-week internship in clinical pastoral education at Brackenridge Hospital.

Father García was ordained to the priesthood on February 1, 1992. The following day, he celebrated his Mass of Thanksgiving at Cristo Rey. His sister, Socorro (García) Bernal, recalls that the many persons who were part of the ministries in which she was involved, helped to organize the day's celebration. Father García recalls, "Many people came, and they had remembered that I had come from the parish. It was a very beautiful experience, and the people were very good."

The Pastorate of Father Albert Ruiz (1983-1984)

In 1983, Bishop Vincent Harris assigned Father Albert Ruiz to serve as pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. Father Ruiz had previously served as associate pastor of the parish in 1974-1975. The return to Cristo Rey was a challenging transition for Father Ruiz. He recalls, "The people were upset [by events occurring under the previous administration], there was no money, and everything was horrible. I even had to fire one of the secretaries." He acknowledges that as a result of the stress, he even became sick for two weeks.



Fr. Albert Ruiz.

Father Fred Chalupa of the diocesan chancery resided with Father Ruiz at the parish's rectory while working at the diocesan chancery. Father Ruiz remembers that the situation at Cristo Rey seemed so serious that the two priests, at the suggestion of a religious sister, undertook a ritual of prayer for the parish. "Late one night," Father Ruiz remembers, "we walked around the church and the rectory with incense, and we prayed." Father Ruiz also credits the spiritual turnaround of the parish to the prayers of the cloistered Carmelite nuns in Lufkin, Texas.

For one year, Father Ruiz was the sole priest serving the Cristo Rey community. He recalls that the parish was primarily English-speaking at the time, but with a Saturday evening Spanish Mass, two English Sunday Masses and two Spanish Sunday Masses.

During Father Ruiz's administration of the parish, the community completed paying off the debt from building the present church, which had been completed in 1959. Father Ruiz helped lead the parish in paying the last \$70,000 toward the debt. "It didn't seem like much," he says, "but it was money we didn't have." Father Ruiz explains how he was able to help retire the debt: "It was prayers, plus *jamaicas* [church festivals]. The money started coming in. We paid the church off, and the cathedraticum [the assessment owed by parishes to the diocese]. [When I left the parish], we even left \$100,000 or \$115,000 in the bank." One Sunday, the note for the debt was publicly burned at the 10:00 a.m. Mass. This is what many parishioners remember of

Father Ruiz. Jesse Niño, for instance, succinctly states that though the people of Cristo Rey had been faithfully fulfilling their debt obligation for nearly 25 years, it was Father Ruiz who “paid for the church.”

Socorro (García) Bernal describes Father Ruiz as “very *Chicano*, a blend of both languages [English and Spanish].” She remembers, “As pastor, Father Albert put us to work. He raised up the parish. He also got my children involved in the church.” She shares the story of how her son, Gustavo, wanted to minister as an altar server, though he had not yet received his First Communion. Socorro introduced the boy to Father Albert, who immediately put him to work. Socorro glows as she shares that all three of her sons (Silvestre, Gustavo and Esteban) served at the First Communion of their sister, Patricia, in 1985.



Silvestre, Gustavo and Esteban Bernal ministering as altar servers during the First Communion of their sister, Patricia.

Frances (Saucedo) Cuevas describes Father Ruiz as “attentive to the people,” and her son, Louis Cuevas, adds that the priest struck him as “bashful, with a friendly smile, but not wanting to make waves.” Juanita (Bazán) López says, “*Qué lindo él* [He was so beautiful]. I proclaimed the Word of God at Mass, and he always had a kind word for me. Once, before Mass, he gave me an apple pin with a cross and said, ‘I’m going to give you a gift, but don’t tell anyone.’ To this day, I’ve not told anyone.”

Eulalio “Edward” Rendón, Sr. recalls that Father Ruiz was a good friend of his children and came over to the house at times. He speaks tenderly of a time in 1975 when Father Ruiz was called to the family’s home during a snowstorm to witness that tears were coming from the eyes of a statue of Jesus in the family’s home. Though Eulalio was in Mexico at the time, he says, “*Fue una cosa increíble. Lo del santo es verdad.* [It was an incredible thing. The story about the statue is true.] We never put it in the newspaper, *pero el Padre sí sabe* [but the priest knows about it].”

In 1985, Bishop Harris, who had previously ordained Father Ruiz, asked the priest to serve as Director of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Austin. Father Ruiz recalls his discernment: "I was surely going to take the Youth Director job. I had been working with kids for so long."

A Cristo Rey Catechist is Ordained to the Priesthood

Father Hilario Guajardo, a priest of the Diocese of Austin, recalls the important role of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in his discernment of the priesthood. A native of Temple, Texas, the future Father Guajardo moved with his family to Del Valle as a young man. In his early 20s, he was working for the State of Texas and attending evening classes at The University of Texas at Austin. On the weekends, he shared his time with his parish.

At the time, the Guajardo family attended Mass at Cristo Rey. Father Guajardo and his mother sang in the 11:30 a.m. choir. Sister Theresa Murillo, F.M.A., the parish's Director of Religious Education, was also involved in the choir, such that Father Guajardo learned of the parish's need for catechists. He volunteered to teach and soon found himself leading a classroom of middle-school students. During breaks between classes, he often played with the students. One day, he remembers, Sister Theresa, who referred to him as "Larry," thought the children were being a bit rough with him. She raised her voice to correct them: "Stop jumping on Larry's back! Respect your teacher. He's not your classmate!"

A decisive moment occurred for Guajardo one October, when he was performing in a parish play about Saint Francis of Assisi. He recalls Father Louis Pavlicek coming to him after the play and saying, "Hilario, I see God calling you." After that day, he began to discern the possibility of serving the Church as a priest. As a child at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Temple, he had once felt called to the priesthood. He now began to discern that call with the diocesan vocation director, Father John McCaffrey, who had previously served as associate pastor of Cristo Rey (1979-1982). During that time, he was also trained as a eucharistic minister.

Bishop John McCarthy ordained Father Guajardo to the diaconate at Cristo Rey Catholic Church. After being ordained to the priesthood the previous day, Father Guajardo celebrated his Mass of Thanksgiving at Cristo Rey on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood

of Christ, May 28, 1989. He recalls being so nervous that the incense he was attempting to spoon into the thurible ended up on the sanctuary carpet.

When asked what he recalls from his ministry at Cristo Rey, Father Guajardo shares, "I remember the love of the people. I knew a lot of families from East Austin and Cristo Rey, and I could feel their love and support. I'm also thankful that during my involvement at Cristo Rey, Sister Theresa [Murillo] and Father Louie [Pavlicek] saw my possible vocation, and encouraged me."

Chapter Eleven

The Mexican Community Comes Home to Cristo Rey: The Pastorate of Father Kirby Garner

“Parishes...weren’t providing for their own people.
So the people came to us.”
Father Kirby Garner

“He was a beautiful person, and he lasted too little....
He was very loving of Mexicans.”
Socorro (García) Bernal

“[Coming to Cristo Rey] was like coming home.
When I got word that I was being moved to Cristo Rey,
I was very, very happy.”
Father Danny García

“They were the greatest years of my priesthood.
This was my ‘number one.’”
Father Kirby Garner

The Arrival of Father Kirby Garner

In 1984, Father Kirby D. Garner was assigned to serve as associate pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. A native of Yorktown, Texas, Father Garner had previously served at St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church in Waco and with former Cristo Rey pastor, Father John Driscoll at Saint Anthony Catholic Church in Bryan, Texas. Father Garner recounts the story:

[Bishop Vincent] Harris came [to Bryan] to bless the graves of two old priests. He was very formal, and everyone was on their P’s and Q’s. As he was leaving, he told me, “I’d like you to make an appointment with me.” Back then, the chancery was much more efficient; there were only three

people [working there]. And someone at the chancery had told [Father] Driscoll, “The bishop wants to move the Garner boy to Austin, to work in the tribunal.” His plan was to send me to study canon law. [In the meantime,] I typed every inquiry [that came through the tribunal]. By the end of the year, I said, “This is not for me. I’m out of here!” [Bishop Harris] said, “I’ll send you to [canon] law school – which would have been a good thing politically, but I had no interest in that.



Fr. Kirby Garner.

Father Garner was thus assigned as associate pastor to St. Thomas More Catholic Church, where he had his first taste of Spanish. Recalling the challenge of learning Spanish, he says,

I took my homilies [in English] to Doña Olivia, and she would translate them [to Spanish] while we had a rum and Coke™. I remember one homily in which I wanted to say, “We are all pilgrims, strangers and travelers on this earth.” But instead of *viajero* [traveler], I said *viejero* [womanizer or woman-chaser] such that I was telling people, “We are all pilgrims, strangers and womanizers on this earth”!

He laughs as he recalls another instance:

When I was hearing confessions at Cristo Rey, I could understand more [Spanish] than I could speak. Some men would confess, “*Ando con mujeres*” [I go out with other women], and I was taught that *andar* means “to walk.” So I’d be thinking, “I walk with women, too.” I remember the story of another priest who misunderstood the meaning of *andar*. He even told a man [in confession], “*No hay problema. Yo ando con mujeres también*” [No problem. I walk [or go out with] with women, too]!

While Father Garner was at St. Thomas More, he says, “[Father] Albert Ruiz was by himself [at Cristo Rey]. He needed help, and I wanted to learn Spanish.” Father Garner was subsequently assigned

as associate pastor of the Cristo Rey community. Within six months, however, Father Garner shares that he was named pastor of the community by default: “Bishop [Harris] offered [Father] Albert the youth office [of the diocese], and [Father Albert] was thrilled. He really wanted that. By default, who got Cristo Rey? [Father] Kirby – who spoke no Spanish!”

Inheriting a Debt-Free Parish

Father Garner recalls how fortunate he was to be the first pastor not to inherit any debt from the building of the church in 1958-1959. Whereas Father Ruiz recalls leaving the parish with a surplus of \$100,00, Father Garner enjoys a different memory: “[Father] Albert ‘bit the bullet’ and paid off the debt. We had no money in the bank, but we were a debt-free parish.” The value, he says, is that people began seeing the tangible results of monies being invested in concrete needs of the parish, rather than being channeled toward a debt. He recalls the many projects realized by the parish with such monies:



*Sandblasting Cristo Rey
Catholic Church, 1984.*

We put a new roof on the church. We tuck pointed and sandblasted the church. We bought new chairs and furniture for the church. We put in sprinklers. We insulated the rectory and put in a new roof and windows. We bought new altar server robes. We put siding on the old convent [at 2201 East 2 ½ Street]. We bought a tamale-making machine. We replated everything [viz., the tabernacle and altar vessels]. When I left [Cristo Rey], it looked like a White people’s parish! In fact, [Monsignor] Elmer Holtmann once remarked that Cristo Rey [when compared to the surrounding neighborhood] was “a pearl in a pig trough”!

Father Garner also remembers the various land purchases made by the parish during his years as pastor. During those years, the parish bought the properties at 2107 East Second Street, 2110 East Second

Street, and three blocks on the southeast corner of East Second and Mildred Streets.

The Mexican Community Comes Home to Cristo Rey

Socorro (García) Bernal credits Father Garner with birthing a new phase in the parish's history: of welcoming to Cristo Rey the immigrant community of Austin. She says, "During his seven years here, his attitude was 'All are welcome.'"



Fr. Kirby, Sr. Theresa & altar servers, 1984.

It was during Father Garner's pastorate that the Mexico-born community from throughout Austin first began flocking to Cristo Rey in great numbers. He recalls,

[Both Austin and Cristo Rey] had a heavy immigrant influx. The immigrants were really coming, and they felt comfortable in East Austin. Our 10:00 a.m. Mass [in Spanish] was standing-room only. We had to put a speaker on the front steps [so that people left standing outside the church could listen to the Mass].

This influx, he notes, created considerable tension within the parish. He says,

There was more racism between Mexican-Americans and Mexicans, than between Whites and Mexicans. I even remember one woman writing me a letter [in Spanish, saying], “*No quiero ir a la Misa de las 10:00. Son puros mojados*” [I no longer want to attend the 10:00 Mass. Those who attend are all wetbacks].

When he arrived at the parish, Father Garner says, there was “not a lot of activity” among the Spanish-speaking community, outside of coming to weekend Masses. He does recall that baptismal preparation and religious education classes were offered in Spanish at the time. Father Garner continues,

So many parishes [at that time] had nothing in Spanish. Those of us who [did minister to the Spanish-speaking] were known as the “six pack” of Mexican-American parishes: Cristo Rey, Dolores, [Our Lady of] Guadalupe, San José, San Francisco Javier, and Santa Cruz. We [the pastors of these parishes] had meetings that were fun, because we had so much in common. We were “tight.” We all had the same needs and problems and frustrations. There were no guidelines from the diocese for things like *quinceañeras*, so we came up with them together. We weren’t getting it from the top, so we got it from one another.

Father Garner shares that most Catholic parishes at the time were not ready to be bilingual. The “six-pack” priests knew firsthand the difficulties inherent in leading bilingual congregations, and they later counseled Bishop John McCarthy against allowing more parishes to offer Spanish Masses. He notes,

[Bishop] McCarthy was always interested in bilingual parishes. When he came to our meeting [of “six-pack” priests], we questioned why they were starting a Spanish Mass at Sacred Heart [Catholic Church]. We were having trouble staffing our own [bilingual] parishes, and now, if the pastor were to leave that parish, we’d have to continue with [the bilingual ministry of another parish]!

One senses the frustration in Father Garner's voice that other parishes were drawing newly-arrived immigrants to Spanish Masses, but that those parishes did little to provide for the spiritual needs of the people outside of Masses. "Those parishes might have had bilingual secretaries," he says, "but they didn't have all the programs. They weren't providing for their own people. So the people came to us."

Father Garner notes that the amnesty of U.S. Immigration law occurred during his pastorate, in 1986, so that many people were also looking for letters of proof that they had resided in the United States for more than four years. He notes, "I still use that [amnesty] as an argument for registering with a parish. I tell people, 'Register! It doesn't matter [in which parish] you register, but [when you've registered in my parish] then I can tell you're coming every week.'" With a touch of sadness in his voice, he adds that 25 years later, many people still do not understand the value of having such a record of their attendance in a parish community. He says,

They still don't get it. Many [people] floated [from parish to parish] and didn't come in to register, so we couldn't help them. We were happy that the amnesty had come, and it helped many people. But there were many people we just couldn't help.

The Cristo Rey Staff

During Father Garner's pastorate, Sister Theresa Murillo, F.M.A. served as the parish's Director of Religious Education. Sister Theresa was one of the first two Salesian Sisters to come to Austin in 1981. Father Garner recalls that the parish provided a stipend of some \$150 per month for Sister Theresa's services to the parish, in addition to paying half the monthly rent for the Sisters' convent on Cherico Street.



The Cristo Rey Parish Staff, Christmas 1987.

In addition to Sister Theresa's ministry to the children of the parish's religious education and altar server programs, Father Garner remembers, "Sister [Theresa] was a good fundraiser. She sold candles and magazines, and she raised the money for the altar server robes." He also jokes, "She was very neat and clean, very organized. We were both neurotic Germans. During Holy Week [for instance], we'd both be on our hands and knees scrubbing floors [in preparation for Easter]."

During these years, Sister Jane Jasso, F.M.A., Sister Socorro Ortega, F.M.A. and Sister Olga Muñoz, F.M.A. assisted the parish's religious education program on a very limited basis. Father



*Sr. Theresa & religious education students
outside the old church, 1984.*

Garner recalls that Sister Jane "loved little kids" and assisted with First Communion preparation classes. He describes Sister Socorro as "an older sister, a little *viejita*, who helped teach a little bit" at both Cristo Rey and Santa Julia Catholic Church.

Deacon Chester Alcalá served as a permanent deacon with the Cristo Rey community during 1989-1992. A native of Venezuela, Deacon Alcalá came to Austin with his wife and children, in order to pursue his graduate studies at St. Edward's University. Father Garner recalls that Deacon Alcalá spoke "perfect English and Spanish."

In addition to the priests, religious sisters, and deacons who served the Cristo Rey community, other persons who assisted the church's ministry at that time included Gloria Acuña and Nelda Martínez, who served as the parish's secretaries; Eloise Webb, bookkeeper; and Johnny Ojeda, the parish's maintenance man; Lucy Maserole and Josefina Carcaño, the cooks at the parish rectory; and Telésforo "Pops" Cásarez, who donated his time for the upkeep of the parish's lawns.

Memories of Parish Ministries

Father Garner remembers many of the parish ministries that were active during his nearly eight years at Cristo Rey. The parish's Pastoral Council was composed of representatives of various parish ministries, and the Finance Council consisted of two or three members appointed by the pastor.

The Altar and Rosary Society possessed a focus that, he says, was "more money than spirituality." Seeing that the same officers had led the group for some 25 years, he remembers telling them, "Girls, we need a constitution [for this group]." He suggested that a new constitution for the group contain limits for terms of office, which inspired longtime members to seek out younger participants in their ministry who, in turn, "really turned things around." He notes that when he left the parish, all ministries possessed such constitutions.

The Men's Club assisted with the upkeep of the parish hall, staffing the facility when it was rented out. They also supported the annual *jamaica* in a great way.

The *Cursillo de Cristiandad* movement, he remembers, "had activities, but they were not a strong powerhouse group."

Toward the end of Father Garner's pastorate, the parish's *Sociedad Guadalupeana* was formed. He remarks, "Priests usually curse the day [on which such ministries] are started. [Priests wonder,] 'What do they do?'" He does recall the *Sociedad Guadalupeana* assisting with various details related to the parish's annual celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society also continued its ministry during these years. The volunteers of this program created an office space in the *Escuelita*, from which they responded to the needs of the people. Father Garner remembers, "There was so much demand. People needed [help with] rent and food. St. Vincent de Paul helped with its voucher program and limited funds." He recalls John Piñeda and Frank Ramírez being the "bedrock" of this program. He says, "It wasn't a big group. They always had a girl staff the office, and the men went to district meetings [of the Society] and brought back money."

The Sunday breakfast groups provided an important subsidy to parish income. Father Garner says, "The kids [of the parish] who grew up in the projects may have gone away to college, but they

always came home to Cristo Rey and supported [their] moms' breakfasts!"

Memories of the *Jamaica*

During those years, the church's annual fundraiser, its *jamaica*, was hosted on parish property. Father Garner says,

Everything was at the church, so it really was a church *fiesta*. There was a neat, family feeling about it. People would be sitting and drinking beer on the front steps of the church. We closed the street and had sound permits, but no one complained because everyone [in the parish] was from the neighborhood.

Father Daniel Helminiak similarly remembers the parish's *jamaicas* at that time as "fun, alive, [and] humanly rich." Father Garner agrees with the importance of this annual event for the financial success of the parish, noting that "we 'sank or swam,' based on the *jamaica*." He shares the story of his first *jamaica* at Cristo Rey:

The storm clouds were rolling in. [Father] Albert [Ruiz, the pastor at that time] and I were so stressed. We went to the church and lit a candle and prayed. My parents [who were coming into town for the event] said the water was running on the curb three blocks away – but a drop never touched the *jamaica*!

The *jamaica*, he says, "was like a business. We'd try to make it more efficient every year." He also remembers another source of financial salvation for the parish: a "slush fund" comprised of monies from the church's candles sales. He shares, "We never had any money, so that [candle money] was our salvation. When the compressor went out [that's how we'd pay for it]. It's how poor parishes [like ours] survived."

The Flourishing of a New Era

Father Garner also remembers certain persons bent on causing problems for him and the parish. In particular, he recalls a certain family that "caused problems to every priest there [at Cristo Rey]."

He explains, “They had their fingers in everything, they intimidated others, and they bitched about priests for years.” Father Garner shares that the family “got on [his] last nerve” when they complained about a legitimate \$10 expense at a parish meeting. Father Garner still remembers his anger, driving back to Austin one day, thinking, “It’s them or me [one of us has to go]: I can’t function like this!” He continues the story:

[They] hired an attorney and sued me, but [Bishop] McCarthy, to his credit, supported me. He said [to them]: “[Father] Kirby is like a new president. He can pick his own cabinet.” They stomped off and left the parish, and everything began to flourish!

Father Garner cites various examples of the “fresh air” that this brought to Cristo Rey: Rogelio García willingly assisted with the purchase of breakfast foods, and Fernando Reyes assumed leadership of the 10:00 a.m. choir. Twenty years later after leaving Cristo Rey, Father Garner mused, “I hope that [those people] realize that I didn’t leave [Cristo Rey] a dump. But [when I was leaving Cristo Rey 20 years ago] I did take the time to warn [the new pastor]: Of all my eight years here, [the members of that family] were my greatest problem!”

Memories of Father Garner

Many parishioners remember Father Garner’s distinguished manner of dressing as a priest: He always wore a black cassock on Sundays, and on Christmas he would don a biretta (a clerical head cover popular before the 1960s). Socorro (García) Bernal recalls this, saying, “I liked to see him crossing the street [dressed] like that.”

Father Garner also had a good sense of humor. He says, for instance: “We had so many damned funerals at Cristo Rey – often two or three a week. My closest friends were the undertakers!” Socorro also recalls a moment of humor. She was telling her children in the presence of Father Garner of how her mother used to say that “even if you take a single cent that doesn’t belong to you, you sell your soul for that one cent.” With a laugh, Father Garner quickly responded, “*Ay, Socorro, ¡Qué poquito cuesta tu alma!* [Oh, Socorro, your soul is worth so little!]”

Socorro also shares that Father Garner had an eye for detail. At that time, Socorro was serving as an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist for the homebound. She recalls how such ministers were asked by the pastor to fill out extensive forms detailing their visits. It was through the information on these forms that Father Garner learned that Socorro's husband, José, accompanied her on such visits. The pastor thus surprised José by calling him forward with all the other eucharistic ministers during a Holy Thursday rite of commissioning. Another very welcomed detail, she says, was the moment when Father Garner sent a farewell letter to each household in the parish.

Various people have fond memories of Father Garner's pastoral nature. Dorothy Portillo shares, "He got me to come back [to the Catholic Church]." She remembers Father Garner for helping her with her annulment and welcoming her back to the sacramental life of the Church. Louis Cuevas also remembers the priest for accompanying him through his divorce.

Diana Coy remembers: "He was the best. Everybody loved Father Kirby. He was so caring, and he was always interested in what you had to say."

Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse recalls,

Father Kirby was fantastic. He was endearing and a fantastic teacher. He was always last, always putting others ahead of himself. He was very gracious and loving—and extremely smart. There was a grandmother who forced her grandson to come to church, where he painted graffiti in the cry room. I remember Father Kirby leading her by the hand to the cry room, where he suggested that she could minister to her grandson in other ways than forcing him to come to church. He was a great role model for my sons. He was also non-contentious—which says a lot.

Memories of an Unidentified Priest (1984)

Though he cannot remember the man's name, Father Garner remembers an old, Anglo, Jesuit priest who assisted at Cristo Rey and was present when Father Garner arrived at the parish in 1984. He recalls that the priest had previously served in the Church's foreign

missions and spoke very good Spanish. He remembers, “He was there when I first got there, but then he wrote a letter to the editor [of the *Austin American-Statesman*] about St. Michael’s [Catholic School]. He said that there was no high school [in Austin] to serve the poor. He pissed the bishop off.”

Memories of Father Irudayam (1985-1986)

Father Irudayam served the community of Cristo Rey as its associate pastor from 1985 to 1986. Father Garner shares, “He was from India. He had no other name but ‘Irudayam.’” Father Irudayam assisted at Cristo Rey while attending St. Edward’s University. Socorro (García) Bernal recalls, “We called him ‘Padre Iru.’ He spoke no Spanish, and he spoke bad English with an accent.” Father Garner remembers that Father Irudayam actually spoke “the queen’s English,” but that people struggled to understand his thick, Indian accent. “He spoke more clearly in Spanish than in English,” Father Garner says. He also remembers, “[Father Iru] was a nice guy. He would wear his ‘wrap-around’ in the house and cook Indian food.” Few stories remain of Father Irudayam. A story by Juanita (Bazán) López, however, illustrates the enduring impact of one of the priest’s homilies on her:



Fr. Kirby & Fr. Iru with Audencio & Dominga Hurtado.

One Sunday, he was talking about the love of God in his homily. He told the story of a hummingbird that gave its blood for a rose. It was the most beautiful story of how much God loves us. Every year, I share it with the children [of my religious education class], and one time they even cried. His homilies hit the heart and made you think. I’m still thinking about that story!

Memories of Father Daniel Helminiak (1986-1988)

Father Daniel A. Helminiak served the spiritual needs of Cristo Rey Catholic Church from 1986 to 1987, as the parish's associate pastor. A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Father Helminiak had previously earned his Doctor of Philosophy in systematic theology from Boston College and was now studying for a doctorate in psychology at The University of Texas at Austin. During his studies, he assisted with priestly ministry in the parish. He recalls,



Fr. Daniel Helminiak

I was in residence at Cristo Rey for two full years, 1986-1988. I was a scholar-in-residence but, more accurately at that point, a student-in-residence, because I was there working on my doctorate in psychology. My responsibilities were limited to weekend assistance with Masses and sometimes with confessions. I remember well the warm and friendly people at Cristo Rey and always enjoyed being there. The greatest gift I received in return—because of my need to preach in Spanish—was practice with the language, which I love and continue to work at, determined to speak it fluently before I die. I also took with me a great love for the Mexican people, who, I always said, were the saving grace of Texas. Without Mexico, Texas would be just another superficial, plastic-and-chrome example of spiritually-bankrupt American materialism.

While at Cristo Rey, Father Helminiak served as editorial consultant for *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, and as student representative to the Graduate Studies Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology at The University of Texas at Austin. While at Cristo Rey, he saw the publication of his first two books: *The Same Jesus: A Contemporary Christology* (1986) and *Spiritual Development: An Interdisciplinary Study* (1987). During his time at Cristo Rey, he also published five essays in scholarly journals.

Remembering the warm welcome extended to him by Father Garner, Father Helminiak recalls, "Living with him and the other

priests in that rectory was my best experience with the ‘institutional church.’” Father Garner remembers Father Helminiak as “an academician and a good preacher—much more liberal than I was!” After leaving Cristo Rey, Father Helminiak wrote the internationally-acclaimed 2000 book, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*. He likes to joke that the Vatican’s refusal to formally recognize his resignation as a priest might be an implicit acknowledgement that “[his] work [is] still the ministry of a *bona fide* Catholic priest.”

Memories of Father Michael Sis (1987-1988)

Father Michael Sis served the spiritual needs of the Cristo Rey community as the parish’s associate pastor from 1987 to 1988.

Father Garner remembers that Father Sis was “a dream: hardworking, easy to live with, people loved him. He was one of few priests I’ve prayed with.” Recalling that Father Michael was a model of humility, Socorro (García) Bernal recalls, “He was a beautiful person, and he lasted too little. He was recently-ordained [at the time], and his homilies were very, very beautiful. He had a good message, and he spoke good Spanish. He was very loving of Mexicans.” Juanita (Bazán) López readily shares, “*Yo digo que Michael Sis es un santo* [I say that Father Michael Sis is a saint].” She shares the story of how the priest accompanied her through a very difficult personal moment.

After serving as Vicar of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin, Father Sis was named bishop of San Angelo, Texas in 2013.

Memories of Father John Boiko (1989)

During 1989, Father John Boiko served the spiritual needs of the Cristo Rey community as the parish’s associate pastor. He particularly recalls the parish’s vibrant baptismal preparation program, in which the priests of the parish would visit the home of each family that was preparing to baptize an infant in the parish. He recalls, “I would go with groups to visit [the families]. For Father to come and ask them about baptism was important to them.” At that time, he says, some ten to fifteen children were baptized during the same ceremony.

Father Boiko also recalls the parish’s Lenten focus on the Stations of the Cross. He shares, “[Father] Kirby wanted to focus on the

Stations of the Cross during Lent, so each week we'd focus on a few stations. As a penance that Lent, I gave people *folletos* [brochures] on the Stations of the Cross and encouraged them to walk with Jesus. Then I'd hear the noise [of them all walking] outside the [confessional] door. They thought they had to do the entire Stations of the Cross [as a penance]!"

Father Boiko remembers the joy with which the people welcomed home Father Victor Goertz for the Solemnity of Christ the King in 1989. He also recalls the sacristan who would arrive every morning to prepare for the 7:00 a.m. Mass. He says,

[Father] Kirby was a stickler for cleanliness, and [the sacristan] didn't like changes very much. [Father] Kirby [celebrated the Mass] his way, I did it my way, and if a different priest was there [rather than the priest that the sacristan expected], he was upset.

Few surviving parishioners seem to recall Father Boiko's ministry to the parish. One parishioner, who asked not to be identified, can only remember: "He spoke poor Spanish, and he would read his homilies. We would laugh, for instance, because instead of saying *pecadores* [sinners], he would always talk about *picadores* [a word with a variety of meanings, including horsebreakers, mounted bullfighters, chopping blocks and meat grinders]." This parishioner believes that most persons thought Father Boiko to be more "*corajudo*" [easily angered] than spiritual.

Memories of the *Hermanos de Juan Diego*

Father John also remembers the weekly Mass that the priests of Cristo Rey celebrated at Our Lady's Family Center on the southwest corner of Chicón and East Sixth Streets. Brother James Hanson, a former Holy Cross Brother, had formed the *Hermanos de Juan Diego* [Brothers of Juan Diego], a religious community of young persons who worked with neighborhood youths. Father John remembers, "Their 'big thing' was poverty. They were supposed to be the poor of the *barrio*. They dressed in a Franciscan-type habit with a picture of the Virgen de Guadalupe or Juan Diego." He recalls Brother César

Guzmán and two other Brothers who have since left the congregation. He also remembers one young woman who was an *Hermana de Juan Diego*, and who later became a cloistered Carmelite nun in Brazil. Various students from The University of Texas at Austin assisted the *Hermanos de Juan Diego* in tutoring the neighborhood children, and Mass was celebrated in the center's chapel every Wednesday evening. The boys of the neighborhood were part of the "Knights of Juan Diego," and the girls formed the *Hijas de María* [Daughters of Mary].



Fr. Kirby with Bro. James Hansen & candidates for the Hermanos de Juan Diego, 1988.

Father Pedro García Ramírez similarly remembers the *Hermanos de Juan Diego*. He says that Monsignor Reyes had invited Brother James to reside at the Cristo Rey rectory, but that the latter responded, "No, I have to live with the people." Brother James subsequently rented a house on the 2300 block of East First Street, from which he began his ministry. Father García Ramírez recalls Brother James saying, "I want to be with them. That's the mystery of the incarnation. Because of my education, I'll never be one of them, but I want to pray with them and suffer with them."

Memories of Father James O'Connor (1990)

During 1990, Father James R. O'Connor briefly served the spiritual needs of the Cristo Rey community as the parish's Associate Pastor. Though preferring not to be specific about the reasons for Father O'Connor's departure, Father Garner remembers,

O God, [his ministry] lasted six weeks. That's a story. He was ultraliberal when I was [a student] at Baylor: The pastor [Father Garner] dressed in a cassock, and [O'Connor dressed] in a Hawaiian shirt. Now [at Cristo Rey], he was ultraconservative: [dressing] in a cassock and biretta!

Memories of Father Danny García (1990-1991)

Father Danny García was assigned to assist the spiritual needs of Cristo Rey Catholic Church as the parish's Associate Pastor from 1990 to 1991. Father García had been ordained in 1988 and fulfilled his first assignment as Associate Pastor at Saint Catherine of Siena Catholic Church in Southwest Austin. He recalls his enthusiasm upon hearing that he would begin serving the Cristo Rey community in June 1990. Father García shares, "Growing up in a Mexican-American parish in Cameron, for me [coming to Cristo Rey] was like coming home. When I got word that I was being moved to Cristo Rey, I was very, very happy."

His enthusiasm, though, was short-lived. Before the end of August, his pastor, Father Garner, had told Father García of a conversation with Bishop John McCarthy, in which the bishop suggested he was thinking of offering the parish to the Conventual Franciscan Friars. Father Garner shares the story:

I was taking the CSA [Catholic Service Appeal] envelopes to the chancery, when [Bishop] McCarthy stopped me and said, "Good to see you, Kirby. Did you see the three priests driving through your neighborhood the other day? They're looking for an inner-city parish." What do you say [to the bishop under such circumstances]? We [as a parish] "fit the bill" for the Franciscans.

Father Garner recalls returning to the rectory to share the news with his associate pastor: "[Father] Danny was just settling in [as associate pastor]. I said 'Put your fork down. I think we're leaving.'"

After the pastor shared the news, Father García went directly to Bishop McCarthy to argue that the diocese retain pastoral leadership of Cristo Rey. He says, "[Our Lady of] Guadalupe [Catholic Church] was already gone [to the pastoral leadership of religious order priests]. Dolores [Catholic Church] was already gone. Cristo Rey was one of the last diocesan inner-city parishes. We needed our stake in the ground in this community." His conversation with the bishop, he says, was "heated and expressive," and he recalls the wide eyes of the bishop's secretary when he left Bishop McCarthy's office.

As a result of the bishop's decision, Father García recalls, "It was a contentious time for me. I was unhappy about the diocese not putting

down a stake and saying, ‘We do care about people in the inner city.’” Father Garner recalls the uncertain future that lay ahead for the priests of Cristo Rey. That uncertainty was soon dispelled. Father Garner remembers:

I had gone on vacation to Atlanta, and [Father] Danny was left in the parish. One day, he was hearing confessions, when he saw three guys [in the church]. He asked them, “Can I help you?” They said, “No, no. We’re just looking around. We’re the Franciscans who will be taking over the parish.” That’s how [Father Danny and I] found out we were leaving! Danny called me in Atlanta and said, “We’re out of here!”

When asked what he remembers most about the Cristo Rey community, Father García instantly responds, “I remember *el ambiente* [the environment]. The hospitality [of parishioners] was overwhelming.” He recalls one early morning Mass, for instance, when an apparently-drunk man entered the church through the south door, near the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He shares,

The people welcomed him into the pew, and he sat down. He was part of the family. When the kiss of peace came, everyone gave him *un saludo de paz* [a sign of peace]. [Cristo Rey] was that kind of community. It didn’t matter who you were or where you were from. You were welcome. That’s the thing I treasure about Cristo Rey.

Father García doesn’t recall celebrating a single wedding during those ten months, but he does figure that he celebrated some forty funerals. He also remembers some forty baptisms per month, in bi-weekly celebrations after the Sunday Masses. He summarizes, “I have fond memories of Cristo Rey. [My time there] was just too short. I got there in late June, and by mid-August, [Bishop] McCarthy was saying, ‘There’s a good possibility you’ll be moved.’ It was difficult to think, ‘I’m ministering to a people I’m leaving!’”

In June 1991, both Father Garner and Father García moved to Saint Louis King of France Catholic Church. The new pastor at Cristo Rey, Father Michael Laltrella, O.F.M.Conv., would reach out to them and invite them back to Cristo Rey from time to time. Father García also

shares how the world is very small, and that a few years later he would be asked to celebrate Mass at a mission church of Saint Cecilia Catholic Church in Ames, Iowa, where the former pastor was Father Laltrella.

Father García was later consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin in 2015, and he was named Bishop of Monterey, California in 2019.

The Departure of Father Garner

There was great sadness at the departure of Father Garner in 1991. Socorro (García) Bernal recalls that parishioners had organized a protest in the street in front of the parish and were collecting signatures to petition the bishop to allow Father Garner to continue his ministry at Cristo Rey. She relates, "Father Garner came into the street and told us, 'Don't do this. It's my time to go.'"

Reflecting on his nearly eight years of ministry to the Cristo Rey community, Father Garner shares, "I had fun. It was my first parish [as pastor]. My heart is still there." Tears come to his eyes, and his voice begins to break: "I'm so emotional about this. They were the greatest years of my priesthood. This was my 'number one.'" Then, with a smile, he adds, "If I won the lottery, I'd give the money to Cristo Rey!"



*The 1991 farewell celebration
for Fr. Kirby & Fr. Danny.*

Chapter Twelve

The Mexican Community Flourishes at Cristo Rey: The Conventual Franciscan Friars at Cristo Rey Catholic Church

“What did we do to deserve you, Franciscans?”
Rogelio García

“To tell the truth, it was a dead parish.”
Father Lawrence Mattingly, O.F.M.Conv.

“[It was] the rebirth of a church: the awakening of a giant
[the Spanish-speaking community] from sleep.”
Socorro (García) Bernal

“Only the Sisters could do this! ...We could not exaggerate
the influence that they had in the development of this community.”
Father Lawrence Mattingly, O.F.M.Conv.

The Arrival of the Conventual Franciscans

The Conventual Franciscan Friars of the southwestern U.S. Custody of Our Lady of Guadalupe (which would later be subsumed into the midwestern U.S. Province of Our Lady of Consolation in the 1990s) were scheduled to begin ministering to the community of Cristo Rey Catholic Church beginning on July 1, 1991. The coming of the friars caused great fear and suspicion within the community. Socorro (García) Bernal recalls some rumors: “People were saying, ‘We’ll have to dress like them. And they’ll be strict. They have many rules!’” Because others did not understand that the term “Black friars” referred to the color of the men’s habits, and not their race, they incited community members to rise up and oppose the coming intruders who would likely not understand the language and culture of the people of Cristo Rey.

Many people recall that the transition did not go well. Father Garner explains,

If [the Diocese of Austin] had done [such a transition] at St. Theresa's [Catholic Church, one of the wealthier parishes in Austin at that time], they would have had a town hall meeting [about the change. At such a meeting, Bishop] McCarthy could have told the people [at Cristo Rey]: "We're tight on personnel [in the diocese]. A religious order is willing to take over [ministry of the parish] and staff it with more [priests and religious brothers] than we have [at present]." And people would have understood. But [instead] he just announced, "Kirby and Danny are leaving, and the Franciscans are coming." That caused a lot of hurt with the people.

The tension with the friars would continue for some years, and Father Lawrence Mattingly would later share stories of his first meeting in the parish in 1995, in which bitter parishioner Rogelio García stood and asked demandingly, "What did we do to deserve you, Franciscans?"

Turbulent Years

Various parishioners suggest that the transition in ministry to the Conventual Franciscan Friars was not easy. Dorothy Portillo, for instance, shares, "The Franciscans came to town, and everything went to hell." Her niece, Helen (Mendoza) Morales, explains, "The congregation was very upset. They didn't want [the Franciscans here]." Dorothy continues, "[Parishioners] were very upset at the bishop for giving away Cristo Rey [to the Franciscans. They were wondering,] "Why not have them at Santa Julia or Dolores or Guadalupe? Why did he pick Cristo Rey? It was ugly." "A lot of people left," says Guadalupe (Briseño) Felán. "And we never got them back," says Dorothy.

Father Michael Laltrella, O.F.M.Conv. served as the first Conventual Franciscan pastor of the parish (1991-1994). Guadalupe (Briseño) Felán describes him as “always a happy person, [and] very friendly.” Socorro (García) Bernal recalls, “He was a very beautiful man. He didn’t speak any Spanish, but you could tell he loved us.” Dorothy Portillo adds, “He tried so hard, and he couldn’t learn Spanish. I would tutor him, and it pained him horribly that he couldn’t communicate.”



*Fr. Michael Laltrella,
O.F.M.Conv.*

Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse remembers Father Michael as “fantastic, very Italian. He expressed a lot of love and emotion. He was open and non-judgmental, and he provided an authentic, home-cooked Italian meal as a raffle prize for our *jamaica!*”

Diana Coy, the parish’s office manager at that time, recalls: “He was real sweet, real nice. He was very caring and enjoyed talking with people. And he was very helpful to parish committees.”

During that same time, Father Francisco de Guadalupe Gómez, O.F.M.Conv. served as Associate Pastor (1991-1994). With restraint, Socorro shares, “He loved people, but he also had his problems. Those years were a sad time [for the parish, and] without a lot of movement.” Helen (Mendoza) Morales is more straightforward: “He was mean, and people hated him. He came in with this attitude, and he said he hated being here. He left a good parish in San Antonio, and he wanted to go back. We felt like poo-poo.” Dorothy Portillo says, “I thought of him as ‘the little pope.’ He had his rules. It was his way or the highway. He was a dictator.” Juanita (Bazán) López recalls, “He said everything that came to mind.”

For a brief time during those years, Father Maurice Hayes, O.F.M.Conv. assisted the parish as well. Parishioners remember him for his long, white “Santa Claus beard.” He also played his banjo and sang bluegrass music at the parish’s annual *jamaica*.

Helen and Dorothy remember that complaints were made to the superior of the Franciscan community, who came to visit the parish. “It was a big to-do,” Helen says. She says a second visit was made,

and “the following weekend, they were gone.” When asked why they left, Dorothy replies, “That’s a private conversation.” Helen quickly covers for her: “He took a ‘sabbatical.’”

Socorro (García) Bernal suggests that the celebration of weekday Mass was a rare occurrence during those initial years with the friars, such that she and Sister Jane Jasso, F.M.A. began a tradition of hosting adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church’s chapel on *viernes santo* [holy Friday]. She says the priests willingly deputized them to expose and repose the Blessed Sacrament for these occasions.

Shortly after leaving Cristo Rey, Father Laltrella died of an aneurism in Ames, Iowa. Various Cristo Rey parishioners, including Socorro (García) Bernal, Zita Chávez, Inez (Portillo) Mendoza, Lily (Mendoza) Reyes and Toribia Valadez, attended the Mass of Christian Burial at Mount Saint Francis, Indiana.

The Beginning of Nine Years with “Hermano Kerry”

Arriving in Austin with the two Conventual Franciscan priests was a Franciscan Brother as well: Brother Kerry Guillory, O.F.M.Conv. Cristo Rey Catholic Church had not enjoyed the ministry of a Brother (a non-ordained member of a male religious congregation) since Bro. Robert Henry, C.S.C. came from St. Edward’s University in the late 1950s to lead a parish choir. Brother Kerry remembers his first trip to Austin in 1991. At the time, he was serving in the pastoral care department of a hospital in San Antonio. He recalls,

It was something new. It was exciting. We [the Franciscans] were excited to be coming into a new diocese. Once they told us we were going [to Cristo Rey], a diocesan priest from San Antonio [Father José De La Rosa] and I decided to come and visit the place. The grass was cut, the church was sparkling: Everything was so nice. Father Kirby gave us a tour, and it made me excited to come!

Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse recalls:

Brother Kerry was a very gregarious guy, very open to people. He listened to people. He was tasked with fundraising, and, my gosh, he did a great job. He was not afraid to ask anyone for anything that was needed, and he

allowed others to enrich themselves by serving the Lord. For many years, I was a money counter for the *jamaica*, and I'll never forget one year that he organized it: That day, I counted \$91,000 in cash! That was all his doing. I was very, very amazed. It was almost scary!

Irma Martínez remembers how Brother Kerry involved her and her husband, Aurelio, in ministry.

Aurelio worked security at Cristo Rey *jamaicas*, and Brother Kerry invited us to go to the *jamaica* meetings. We started getting more and more involved, and even our daughter became an altar server at Cristo Rey. We helped with the *jamaica* ad book. We would make \$15,000 to \$20,000 through that book, with ads from \$100 to \$2,000. Brother Kerry worked with local funeral homes, so they competed for various ad spaces.

Dolores “Dottie” Chapa says:

Brother Kerry really did a lot of good with that Joy Group. We did rosaries for all the *difuntos* [dead], then the Joy Group would serve the funeral reception at the parish center. He came from a big family, with a brother who's the bishop of Beaumont and a brother who's a priest in Louisiana—and he was really good at raising money. He made sure I joined the Joy Group, to give my mom a ride. Other early members included Rosario López, Patsy Gonzales, Otilia Vallejo, Inez Mendoza, Amelia Pérez, Pete and Tonie Velásquez, Julio and Isabel Terán, Don and Ruby Ream, Jesse and Nina Castro, and Raymond and Mary Vásquez. Roy Gómez was part of it, and Mary Ann Serrano, and, after her husband died, Mary Lou Piña got involved in it and in every club at the church. Brother Kerry had a big group!

The Saint Francis of Assisi Joy Group

Brother Kerry recalls that Bishop John McCarthy had heard of his work with the elderly and homebound. Brother Kerry says,

[Bishop McCarthy] asked me to visit them and take Communion to them, and bring them joy! So I met [Otilia] "Tillie" Andrade and Nellie Reyna, and I said, "You all need to introduce me to the elderly, so that we can minister to them. We put an announcement in the bulletin for a meeting of people who wanted to minister to the sick and dying. Twelve people showed up [at the meeting]. We decided we were going to call it the "Joy Group."

The members of the "St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group," as the group would soon be called, daily ministered to the ill, elderly and homebound, visiting them, bringing them Communion, and sharing with them a bit of joy. They also assumed responsibility for reciting the rosary at funeral homes for deceased community members, and for being present at parish funerals.

After the death of his daughter, Michelle, in 1995, Roy Gómez, donated her van to the parish, for the use of the St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group. For several year, the van, with its newly-decaled lettering, announced the tremendous ministry of the Joy Group throughout the city.

During the next 20 years, largely under the leadership of Roy Gómez, with the support of Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña, who gladly dialed members for their assistance, the St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group prayed over 1,000 funeral rosaries at the church and at local funeral homes. Many people also remember the trips and pilgrimages that the Joy Group sponsored to casinos and to pilgrimage sites in San Juan, New Orleans, Georgia, New Mexico, Rome and the Holy Land.

Huge *Jamaicas*

Brother Kerry also assisted the parish's annual fundraiser, the *jamaica*. He recalls that the event easily raised \$40,000 to \$80,000 each year. He shares his secret for helping to raise such amounts of money: "I got away from the *barrio* and found where the rich lived, and I asked them to help out. And they did! They paid for the bands and the expenses of the park [Fiesta Gardens]." Nearly fifteen years later, he recalls the leadership of such people as Gilbert Velásquez and Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse. He also remembers that Aurelio

Martínez of the Austin Police Department “got the police department to work cheap for us.” He shares,

The *jamaica* was something special. It was recreation for the folks of Austin. They looked forward to coming. [The Cristo Rey *jamaica*] was one of the biggest ones in Austin. People came to enjoy themselves, meet people, and listen to good music.

The Cristo Rey Neighborhood in the 1990s

When asked what the greatest challenge of ministering at Cristo Rey was, Brother Kerry points to the changing nature of the neighborhood. He says,

The people on the Eastside were the “little people.” They were good people, but there was a lot of prejudice [against them. People would say,] “They’re in the *barrio*. That’s where they belong. Let’s keep them there.” I got involved in the city and tried to help get [the people of the neighborhood] out of their situation, their way of thinking.

He also notes the rapidly changing face of East Austin:

[City officials] were talking about reviving the area, bringing in more Whites. Whites were beginning to buy out the poor people. We saw that coming, and that’s exactly what happened. When I was there [from 1991 to 2000], there were none of those new condos and homes and businesses. We were trying to get people to remodel and revive their own homes and stay put.

Memories of the First Franciscan Priests

Brother Kerry lived with Father Laltrella and Father Gómez at their friary, their residence at 2109 East Second Street. He remembers that Father Laltrella was “a very kind, gentle human being. The people just loved him. He was very kind to the people, always with a smile and very easygoing, a good listener.” He credits various parishioners with helping to translate for Father Laltrella and “make him shine” during Sunday Masses. Brother Kerry says, “[Father Laltrella] didn’t

last but three or four years. It was too much for him. He wanted to go back to an English environment.”

Brother Kerry explains that Father Gómez was struggling with illness:

He was a sickly guy. He had diabetes. It made him look as if he was mean. He was a very kind guy, but underneath his foot he had a sore, and they eventually had to cut off his foot, then part of his leg, then another part of his leg. He was suffering, and the people didn't understand him. They thought he was mean, but he was sick.

Brother Kerry says that Father Hayes assisted such English-speaking organizations as the Knights of Columbus for at least a year, while attempting to learn Spanish. When asked if Father Hayes ever played his banjo at the parish, Brother Kerry says, “Oh God, yes. [The people of Cristo Rey] weren't used to hearing a *gringo* singing bluegrass music. They put him on at the *jamaica* for twenty minutes and let him sing. The people were kind: They clapped.”

Brother Kerry says that a Brother James Josh DuPlissey also resided at Cristo Rey for some few weeks, though he did not minister at the parish.

Memories of Brother Kerry Guillory

Brother Kerry Guillory served the Cristo Rey community from 1991 to 2000. Amelia (Vallejo) Pérez remembers, “He was a very good man. We was always trying to bring people into the Church.” Francisco Rodríguez recalls, “He was a good Brother. [My wife and I] joined the Joy Group, and there were 60 to 70 members then. He used to take us on trips. We went to a lot of places with him.” Francisco also remembers, “We used to argue with him, but the next day, we'd make up.” Juanita (Bazán) López remembers such arguments that she had with the Brother, but she concludes, “I had so many good and bad moments with Brother Kerry, but he was always taking care of the seniors, the elderly. And [I remember] those trips we used to make to casinos here and there!” In particular, she remembers how Brother Kerry would often tell her, “I love to hear you proclaim [the Word of God]! You are the Mother of Cristo Rey Church!” Helen (Mendoza)

Morales remembers, “He knew how to raise money. He always found donations. He was a friend of [the wealthy]. He was a piece of work!”

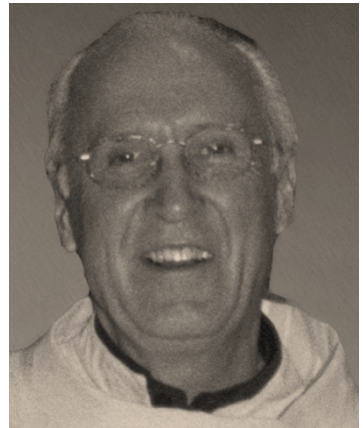
Memories of Father John Elmer

With the prompt departure of Fathers Laltrella and Gómez in 1994, the Conventual Franciscan Friars sent Father John Elmer, O.F.M.Conv. to administer the parish as the community awaited a new pastor. Brother Kerry shares, “[Father Elmer] was a healer, and people needed to be healed. After losing two priests, the people [of Cristo Rey] had a lot of questions, and they wanted stability. [Father Elmer] tried to bring that peace, and he told them [the Franciscans] were going to send a priest who spoke Spanish.” Socorro (García) Bernal, who tutored Father Elmer in Spanish for two years, says, “He was very spiritual. He inspired us a lot to keep going forward.” Juanita (Bazán) López similarly describes him as “very simple, humble and without guile.”

The Arrival of Father Lawrence Mattingly

In January 1995, Father Lawrence “Larry” Mattingly, O.F.M.Conv. began his service as the twelfth pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church. After serving Cristo Rey Catholic Church for eleven years, he would be the parish’s second longest-serving pastor, next only to Father Victor Goertz.

In his early 30s, Father Mattingly was previously elected the youngest-ever superior of the Midwestern province of Conventual Franciscan Friars, a position he held for an unprecedented twelve years. He then went to serve in the



Fr. Larry Mattingly, O.F.M.Conv.

Church’s missions in Central America for an additional twelve years, and was elected the superior of the friars who ministered in those countries. When he returned to the United States, his religious order was looking for a Spanish-speaking friar who might serve the needs of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in Austin. Father Mattingly shares, “I

didn't know anything about the parish, or about Austin, or about Texas. So I went with pure ignorance to see and learn."

Diana Coy, the office manager of the parish at that time, remembers literally welcoming Father Larry to Austin: "I picked him up at the airport and brought him to Cristo Rey: to the rectory and the office. He asked, 'How big is this town?' I said a half-million. He talked about coming from the missions in Central America and how this was going to be very different for him."

Father Mattingly described Cristo Rey at the time that he arrived in 1995. He says,

To tell the truth, it was a dead parish, in my opinion. One day, I asked [Brother] Kerry, "Doesn't anyone come here at night?" He said, "No, the office closes at 5:00 p.m., and we call it a night." It seemed strange to me, but that's how it was. I didn't see a lot of activity around the church.

A Place of Positive Treatment for the Recently-Arrived

Father Mattingly well recalls the treatment of the Mexican population that attended the parish, and he began to formulate a strategy that would define his eleven years as pastor. He explains:

I immediately observed that the immigrant population came to the church more like visitors, without any rights to anything. I remember seeing so many parishes so close together: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Santa Julia, Dolores and Cristo Rey. My question was: What are we going to do with this parish? My idea was to create a space for the immigrant people. I invited a group of people, including Milo Jaimes, to ask their opinion on the parish, and what they were doing, and their presence [in the parish], and how they were accepted. They told me, "We're here [at Cristo Rey] as visitors. [The Mexican-Americans of the parish] tolerate us, but we really have no rights here. We're not part of the groups and ministries here. So I set the goal that Cristo Rey would be the place in Austin in which the recently-arrived could arrive and receive a positive treatment, that we would help them in what we could, and

we would help them to feel that this was their church, that they were not visitors but full members of the parish.

Father Mattingly notes that the idea was not warmly received by many. He says,

It was a delicate topic then. The *Tejanos* were saying that I had neglected them and chosen immigrants instead. I said, "That's not true. There's room for everyone here, but if we—having so many parishes so close to us—don't include the immigrants, we don't have a reason for being."

The new pastor began by forming *grupos de base* [base ecclesial groups], a Latin-American ecclesial model in which people gather in their own homes to read scripture together and pray. He says, "Those groups who stuck with it and kept meeting, bringing along their bibles, it really changed their lives. That was how we started." Father Mattingly then began convening focus groups of recently-arrived people to openly discuss their participation in the parish. He recalls, "That's when I realized that the Texans treated [the recently-arrived] like [they] came to Mass but did nothing else, as if they didn't contribute to and support the parish."

In 1995, the parish hosted a Saturday evening Spanish Mass, two Sunday English Masses, and two Sunday Spanish Masses. Father Mattingly decided to offer a third Sunday Spanish Mass in the evening, bringing in the family of Segundo and Teodolinda Argueta from Honduras to provide the music. Father Mattingly shares, "Having arrived from Central America, I was very interested in helping people to integrate their culture into the life of the parish."

The Birth of New Ministries and of Leaders' Meetings

Father Mattingly shares his philosophy: "A parish without ministries is a community in which people don't know one another, in which there's no warmth, where the people go to Mass and [then] go home. That's what I found at Cristo Rey when I arrived." He saw one existing ministry, breakfast groups, as a way to get people meeting one another, talking with one another, and working together.

The pastor never discouraged parishioners from realizing the dreams they brought to him. He shares, "If someone came to me with

an idea, saying, 'we'd like to bring this ministry to the parish,' so long as it didn't involve my time, I'd say, 'Go for it! You lead it, and I'll support you.'" This is exactly what happened in the case *el Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* [Christian Family Movement], and Christ Renews His Parish: Leaders stepped up, who desired to bring these ministries to Cristo Rey. Father Mattingly recalls empowering the leaders of parish ministries. He says, "I believe that if someone has a job, they have to do it, and they have to do it their way. Every person has his/her way to organize and do things."

The Christian Family Movement

In 1997, Father Mattingly welcomed to Cristo Rey the *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* (Christian Family Movement), which quickly spread throughout the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin. Twelve years later, *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* would publish this history and description of the ministry:

The Christian Family Movement of Cristo Rey Catholic Church is a vibrant ministry helping couples and families to grow in their relationship with God and others. The Christian Family Movement is an international ministry which began in 1969 and has prospered in more than 55 cities nationwide. Its mission is to create united couples, happy homes, harmonious relationships among parents and children, and environments where children can grow and develop in a Christian environment.

In 1997, Cristo Rey Catholic Church was the first parish in the Austin Diocese to host the Christian Family Movement. The movement has since spread to over 12 parishes in the Austin area.

More than 75 couples from our parish presently participate in the Christian Family Movement. They compose 13 dialogue groups, which meet in homes every two weeks to discuss a theme related to marriage and family life. Each theme concludes with a reflection on a scriptural passage. The couples then make a concrete commitment, which they work on during the next two weeks.

The Christian Family Movement hosts various general meetings to which all couples are invited, and at which topics of family life and spirituality are discussed. They also host their annual "*Día del Campo*," an event featuring various sports for parents and games for children at Richard Moya Park. They monthly celebrate Mass together as a movement, and they host four to five Sunday breakfast groups each year to benefit our parish community. They have also expanded into more actively serving the youth of our community, and a recent youth retreat hosted by the movement attracted more than 120 children.

Miguel and Telly Garcia, who serve as Coordinators of the Christian Family Movement at Cristo Rey, have been involved in the movement for eight years. Telly shares that the movement has helped them to enjoy a better marriage and home life. Miguel notes how he and his wife have grown as a couple, and how their children have become active in our parish community as a result of the movement.

José and Luz Serrano, who have completed all four stages of formation in the movement, presently serve as Treasurers of the parish's movement. Luz observes, "We've changed a lot [as a result of the movement]. Last year, we were married, and things are going much better for us." When asked which conversational topics she has particularly enjoyed as part of the movement, Luz shares that a set of six reflections on marital fidelity made a strong impression on many of the couples with whom they journeyed. José glows in his praise of the movement. He says, "It's the best thing we've found in life. We were here in the U.S. for many years, and we would go to Mass out of habit. Since joining the movement, we've changed a lot, as individuals and as a couple. Everything has changed for the better, and words cannot describe how happy we are with the Christian Family Movement. It's been a beautiful experience."

Eugenio and Carolina Tapia are presently participating in the first stage of formation in the movement. Eugenio says he particularly enjoyed a recent conversation on

dialogue. “[My wife and I] didn’t used to talk about the things happening between us,” he shares, “but now it’s different. Now we can talk about what’s happening in our relationship, at work, or at home.” Carolina agrees, “We are definitely communicating more as a couple. Now we discuss the problems we have, and we try to look for solutions. We’re able to settle the differences we have in a more calm way, and without yelling.”

Ernesto and María Falcón are now completing their second year with the Christian Family Movement. María shares that even her nine-year old son goes to school talking about what the family is learning as part of the movement. She confesses, “Before entering the Christian Family Movement, we had many problems, and we didn’t speak as a couple. Since then, we’ve discovered how to dialogue as a couple and how to better help our children. The movement helped us to overcome many of the problems we had and to make better decisions as a family.” Ernesto agrees, “The movement has helped us a lot. I can see the difference in my life and in my family’s life. We’re happy to be part of the Christian Family Movement.”

From St. Vincent de Paul Society to Social Ministry

Under Father Mattingly’s leadership, Cristo Rey severed its former ties to the St. Vincent de Paul Society in 2003 and began to expand its social ministry outreach. A 2009 article in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* shares:

Our parish community has long served those in need through our parish social ministry. For many years, the generosity of our parish community was channeled to the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which cared for those in need of assistance with food or shelter. Six years ago, when our parish community separated from the Society, our present Social Ministry was born.

Our Social Ministry is opened every Thursday evening at 5:30 p.m., and assists people on a first-come, first-served basis. The ministry possesses a food pantry created in our parish center and is able to serve those in need due to the

generosity of parishioners who contribute to a special second collection on the first weekend of each month. In addition to its food pantry service, our Social Ministry also provides referral services, a diaper ministry for mothers with young children and those who need adult diapers, and monetary assistance with utility bills, prescriptions, rent and other miscellaneous needs. Priority is given to those from our parish neighborhood (the 78702 zip code), though an attempt is made to assist all in need. Applications for monetary assistance are reviewed the first Thursday of each month, and are considered based on family size, need, and lack of expendable income. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, our parish Social Ministry also serves an additional 50 families by providing holiday baskets.

Yolanda Velásquez, who directs our parish's Social Ministry, shares that an important element of this ministry is providing not only food and basic needs, but also love to those who come for assistance. A number of parishioners volunteer with this ministry, including Barbara Godoy, Gloria DeLeón and Betty Zapata. Additionally, parishioners Frank Martínez and Jesse Castro assist with picking up our weekly order of food from the Capitol Area Food Bank, and stocking the shelves of our food pantry. We are also grateful to Ryan Durán and Lauren Tibbet, two community members who have volunteered their time and love to this parish ministry. Other persons of good will, including the Rangel family and the children of our Religious Education programs, generously give of their resources to keep our pantry shelves full.

Leaders Meetings

Father Mattingly began bringing together the leaders of all parish ministries and groups on a regular basis. He says, "The leaders came together and made decisions. They began to respect one another more." He also discovered that many more parish leaders shared the Spanish language in common, than the English language. He shares,

“When we first came together, we were speaking two languages, but then we found that a lot of *Tejanos* also spoke Spanish.”

He notes that this group of leaders essentially became a “pastoral council” of sorts for the parish. He enumerates the weaknesses of the previous pastoral council:

They were people who came to Mass, but they didn’t know anyone. They weren’t involved in the parish. Yes, they came to Mass, but they didn’t have that sense of love for the parish that you have to have if you’re going to give your time to the church. [In contrast,] ministry leaders have invested something of their person, their care, their talent. If we can bring together these leaders, we’ll touch a lot of people. So I said, “This isn’t working. Why should I waste my time talking about things that [Pastoral Council members] don’t even understand because they’re not even involved in the activities of the church? We’re going to try something new!”

The Dream of Expanding the Escuelita

Father Mattingly recalls pastoring the community during the years in which the old mission church, the *Escuelita*, was remodeled and greatly expanded. He remembers the great interest of parishioners in delving into such a project:

A few months after I arrived, a small group of people, all *Tejanos*, came to speak to me about a new formation center. I really was not interested in building anything. I formed a committee, thinking that they’d meet a few times and then get tired, and we’d be done with that idea. But it didn’t happen that way.

Father Mattingly recalls how parishioners wanted to build a large facility to accommodate the parish’s growing needs and programs. He admits he attempted to dissuade them from such an idea:

I figured the group would say, “This is too big [a project] for us!” We talked about various possibilities, and by the time we were ready to go to the Diocesan Building Commission, they wanted to build it large, and I told them,

“We can’t.” Then one member of the committee said, “This is the first time that this pastor is trying to keep us down, to keep us from doing what we want to do!” So we went forward with the dream.

The members of the committee began to raise funds for the project. Father Mattingly confesses, “I worried about how we’d pay for it.” Fortunately, he shares,

The diocese helped us, and various foundations helped us. I remember one monsignor saying, “I have someone willing to donate \$50,000, and I’d like to direct him to you. He’s willing to give it to you if you can raise another \$50,000.” During that time, we raised over a million dollars. We also had to put a new air conditioning unit in the church at that time. It cost \$130,000. We added it to the *Escuelita* debt.

Parishioners began to raise money through a pledge drive and various events. Father Mattingly continues the story:

They worked hard, and the moment arrived in which we had raised nearly \$1,000,000 through foundations and various sources, so the Diocese gave us permission to build. We chose an architect. One woman on the committee was an engineer and helped lead us through the process of selecting an architect. The only place to build was where it is today. There was a house on the corner that didn’t belong to us. It really was a “crack house,” [where crack cocaine was sold], and the woman didn’t want to sell to us. [In the end,] we bought the house and moved it to another place. And we kept raising money. And the time came to build. The architects suggested that we start anew, that it would be cheaper, but the people wanted to save the *Escuelita*, so we cut off the front part and built the rest new.

On the afternoon of November 26, 2000, Bishop John McCarthy was present for the groundbreaking ceremony of the new *Escuelita*, which occurred during a celebration of the parish’s fiftieth anniversary. Fifty-four weeks later, Bishop McCarthy’s successor,

Bishop Gregory Aymond, would bless and inaugurate the new facility on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12, 2001.

At the time the building was completed, Father Mattingly remembers, it seemed large. Soon thereafter, he says, the facility was filled to capacity, and parish groups had to reserve spaces in the facility.

La FUENTE Learning Center

During the summer of 2001, Father Mattingly called a meeting of parish staff, to which he invited Olga Cuellar, an advocate for children who came armed with data on student performance in nearby schools. Father Mattingly shared the dream of opening a learning center in the soon-to-be-completed *Escuelita*. Having read in a national publication of the work of Sister Jennie Lechtenberg at PUENTE Learning Center in Boyle Heights, a suburb of Los Angeles, California, Father Mattingly invited her to Austin for a conversation, and she readily obliged. After that meeting, Father Mattingly was convinced of the need for a PUENTE in Austin. He assigned the task to Father Mathias, who quickly drafted the necessary Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws for the new organization. Father Mathias also fashioned the new name for the center: La FUENTE, an acronym meaning Forming, Uniting and Educating Neighbors Toward Excellence. Father Mattingly served as the President of the organization, Father Mathias as Vice President, and Olga Cuellar as Secretary. Father Mathias shares the following anecdote of his first attempt to visit PUENTE in California:

Father Larry wanted Olga and me to visit PUENTE, to begin dreaming of and creating the programs that we would offer here at La FUENTE. Olga and I purchased our tickets: I flew out early in the morning, and she planned to join me in Los Angeles later in the afternoon. My layover was in Nashville, Tennessee, where I was rather oblivious to any goings-on around me. I visited the shoe shine, then walked to the gate for my next flight. No one was there—except an airline representative who seemed preoccupied. I asked her about the status of my flight. She looked at me quizzically: “Haven’t you heard? Our country is under attack!” It was September 11, 2001, and I was headed to Los

Angeles, the destination of three planes that were downed that day! Needless to say, the airport was quickly evacuated, I was made to board a bus heading to Dallas, and I arrived back in Austin the next day.

Father Mathias began offering near-daily English classes from the conference room inside the parish Social Ministry office, which was located at 2107 East Second Street. The classes began drawing 10 to 20 people per class. He and Olga recruited the Salesian Sisters and a few volunteers, and announced the first classes to be held in the soon-to-be-completed La FUENTE Learning Center at 2215 East Second Street, where large, metal letters were prepared to mark the newly-expanded facility as La FUENTE from its inauguration on December 12, 2001. Weeks before, when the building was safe for occupancy, they piloted a four-week course of specialized English classes for Spanish-speaking persons working in various industries: in construction, in the restaurant industry, in hospitality, in mechanics, and in housekeeping. Nearly 250 people, largely from Cristo Rey, participated in the program.

La FUENTE grew from there. Chencho Flores, a certified instructor of English as a Second Language (ESL) at Austin Community College, offered to apply for federal funding of the program, which led to a multi-year federal grant of some \$116,000 per year for La FUENTE's ESL program.

Thomas Cogdell and Benjamín Villafuerte helped to establish a computer lab in the classroom in the northeast corner of the first floor, where Cristo Rey hosted the first Delta program—an innovative platform offering online courses and allowing at-risk students to study at their own pace and under the tutelage of a certified teacher—outside an Austin ISD facility. Benjamín remembers, “Olga got the computers, and installed the software and added them to the network.

Inez (Portillo) Mendoza and Juanita (Bazán) López shared their gifts for sewing through sewing classes that were popular among women of both languages.

The Salesian Sisters worked with representatives of the Mexican Consulate to bring teachers from Mexico for a two- to four-week *Plan Vacacional*, to teach Spanish-speaking children in Austin about the language, history and culture of their ancestors' homeland.

In partnership with the Mexican Consulate, Father Mathias also began offering courses of the Mexican Government's *Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos* (INEA, the National Institute for Adult Education), which would allow adults in Austin to earn diplomas for completing their elementary and middle school education in Spanish. Father Mathias recalls that INEA invited him to a training for trainers in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, on July 29 to August 2, 2002. He readily obliged and couldn't resist sneaking to Mexico City on July 31 for the canonization of Saint Juan Diego by Pope John Paul II—an event for which he had no ticket, but soon received one from his friend, Father Miguel Camacho Méndez of Ciudad Valles, San Luis Potosí, Mexico, who had previously visited family members at Cristo Rey and whom Father Mathias saw in the crowd outside the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. "If it weren't for INEA and the Holy Spirit," he jokes, "I never would have celebrated Mass with the pope!"

Expansion of the Ministry of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Father Mattingly reflects that the new *Escuelita* was "a suitable place [of ministry] for our Salesian Sisters," whom he describes as "the heart of the parish." He recalls the coming of additional Sisters to Cristo Rey:

When I first came [to Cristo Rey], there was one full-time Sister and one part-time Sister. Their provincial [Sister Phyllis Neves, F.M.A.] came to me and said, "[Cristo Rey] is the place where we should be." She asked if she could send two more Sisters. I didn't have the money, but I said, "Sure!" And [Sister Phyllis] sent some very well-prepared Sisters: with degrees and experience. But all their experiences were in Catholic schools. For them, coming to Cristo Rey was like coming to a mission. It was so different from what they were used to. But they adapted well, and each had her ministry in line with her talents, and I never had to micromanage them.

Here, Father Mattingly is referring to Sister Irene Tapia, F.M.A., Sister Sylvia Castillo, F.M.A. and Sister Martina Ponce, F.M.A., the parish's

Director of Religious Education; Sister M. Guadalupe Medina, F.M.A., the parish's Director of Youth Ministry; and Sister Emma Stefanoni, F.M.A., the parish's Director of Adult Formation. Under their leadership, the number of children in the parish's religious education programs grew from less than 300 to more than 1,000. Father Mattingly says that this growth "was because of [the Sisters]. They knew how to speak the people's language. They knew [the people's] culture, they treated them well, and they summoned the help of a lot of people." He notes, for instance, that Sister Martina trained more than 55 catechists to be certified religious education teachers. He continues, "When [Bishop Aymond] came [to Cristo Rey] to recognize [the teachers], I said, "Only the Sisters could do this!" They deserve a large part of the credit...We could not exaggerate the influence that they had in the development of this community."

Youth Ministry at Cristo Rey

In August 1995, three months after Father Mattingly's arrival, the Conventual Franciscan Friars assigned a young seminarian, Brother Jayme Mathias, O.F.M.Conv., to Cristo Rey Catholic Church for a nine-month internship in parish youth ministry. A native of rural Ohio, Brother Jayme had just completed his undergraduate studies in philosophy and classical humanities at St. Louis University, and was eager to serve the parish community. Months before, Sister Irene Tapia, F.M.A., the parish's Director of Religious Education, had begun to bring together the English-speaking adolescents of the parish. She would now task Brother Jayme with tending to the needs of this group and to initiating the parish's first youth ministry program for Spanish-speaking youths.

The parish had recently emptied its facility on the northeast corner of East Second and Robert Martínez Streets, and Brother Jayme worked to transform the space into the parish's youth ministry office.

He remembers, "Those young people did a lot in those nine months: They hosted weekly meetings for the youths of the parish, as well as numerous retreats and lock-in's. They responded with enthusiasm to the challenges they faced." He remembers that one such challenge lay in reaching out to youths who were involved in gang activity in the neighborhood. "It was disheartening at times," he says. He continues,

We would work with certain youths one evening, and find their 'tags' [gang names] sprawled on neighborhood walls and signs the next morning. We would go on retreats and find them sneaking off to smoke marijuana. At times, we really wondered if we were making a difference.

Marcos Chapa laughs as he tells stories:

Brother Jayme was wild and crazy. He brought life to the church. We were a lot more comfortable being with somebody closer to our age. Susie Mireles and Manuel Serrato helped him. They were great. One night, we had a lock-in, and we were watching a scary movie. Brother Jayme walked outside for something, and we closed the sliding door on the south side of the youth house. He ran right into the door – and we laughed all night, until the sun came up!

The parish's first ministry to Spanish-speaking youths also came together during that year. Brother Jayme recalls that his took some period of adjustment for the English-speaking teens. He shares,

They were accustomed to thinking, "This is 'our' parish, and *our* youth ministry house." It took them time to become accustomed to the idea of sharing: sharing "our" parish, sharing "our" youth house, and sharing the time and attention of "our" director of youth ministry.

By January, Brother Jayme says, the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking youths had come together for their first bilingual retreat. He shares,

It was a turning point insofar as the parish had grown accustomed to hosting two separate communities. During the experience, all were committed to struggling a bit in a foreign language and with persons they didn't entirely understand. We were beginning to build bridges!

The parish's youth ministry programs blossomed during those nine months. Brother Jayme recalls how the English-speaking youths had prepared a three-day Lenten mission for the parish, and how the

Spanish-speaking youths were forming themselves into a group that they called LI.VI.N. or *Liberación y Vida Nueva* [Liberation and New Life]. This group performed the parish's first Live Way of the Cross (pictured to the right) inside the church on Good Friday 1996. Father Jayme laughs as he recalls the event:

They were so enthusiastic, but they weren't so skilled in "planning-backwards" [from the event]: Not all the costumes came together in time, and the cross was dripping with wood stain, which, in turn, stained the hands of "Jesus" and all who touched it. Jesus may have been born free of the stain of sin, but this very human depiction of Jesus proclaimed his association with our "stain"!

Socorro (García) Bernal, whose daughter, Patricia, was involved in the parish's youth ministry programs, suggests, "[Brother Jayme] was the best thing that ever happened to [our parish]. He was *el escalón que nos subió al peldaño* [the step that raised us to the top]." Socorro shares the story that her daughter recently chatted with another adult leader of that time, Ángel Ceballo, who helped to lead the early Spanish-speaking youth efforts in the parish. They concluded that Brother Jayme "spoke Spanish, our Spanish, with many of the expressions that we use. We identify with the way he speaks."

Diana Coy, the parish's office manager at that time, recalls: "Brother Jayme was young and good-looking and very talented. He could sing and play music and get people involved in the church. He had a lot of ideas and helped the church grow a lot."

In June 1996, in light of Brother Jayme's imminent departure, Father Mattingly announced that the



Brother Jayme (in the white cowboy hat) with LI.VI.N., Cristo Rey's 1st Spanish-language youth group, 1996.

parish would hire its first full-time Director of Youth Ministry. Brother Jayme recalls,

Actually, what he said was that my presence in the parish caused him a \$14,000 problem, which was the salary that a parish might expect to pay a full-time Director of Youth Ministry at the time. To his credit, he seemed happy to pay it, to respond to the needs of the youths of the community.

During his entire pastorate, Father Mattingly would consistently show his support for the youths of the parish and diocese. In 1996, he hired Emiliano Díaz de León as the parish's first lay Director of Youth Ministry. Richard Galván succeeded him in 1997. In 1998, Sister M. Guadalupe Medina, F.M.A., who served as the parish's Director of Religious Education the previous year, began leading the parish's youth ministry programs, a position she held for nearly ten years. During Sister Guadalupe's ministry, the English-speaking youth would re-brand themselves as "Youth R.O.C.," an acronym for "Rely on Christ," and the Spanish-speaking youth ministry would be invigorated by the leadership of Antolín Aguirre, a young man from Mexico who arrived in Austin with the experience of working with a youth group in the Carolinas named, *Jóvenes Unidos*. For the next twelve years, the *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey* would be a source of energy and activity in the parish until the group dissolved in 2010. From 1999 to 2006, Father Mattingly also employed Marcelino "Jack" Salazar as a part-time "Street Minister," to serve the needs of neighborhood teens who were dropping out of school, involving themselves in gangs, and/or who were caught in the juvenile justice system.

In 1999, Father Mattingly brought the *Jornada Juvenil de Cristiandad* to the parish, thus initiating what would grow to be a formidable diocesan ministry.

In June 2000, Brother Jayme Mathias, O.F.M.Conv. returned to the parish, this time as a transitional deacon. In addition to many other duties, he worked to reinvigorate the parish's Spanish-speaking youth ministry program. He shares,

We always faced two grave challenges with Spanish-speaking youth ministry. First, no one is young forever. Youths who were active for a year or two often found

themselves wanting to pursue other interests, including relationships and marriage. Second, there was never a great deal of stability among undocumented youths, such that leaders would often come and go. Leadership development was a constant endeavor.

On one evening, atop Mount Bonnell, Deacon Mathias brought together Aarón Rodríguez, Silvia Arzate and Francisco Vázquez. These three young adults from Mexico shared a common experience of having previously served the Church in Mexico as part of a missionary organization, the *Misioneros Servidores de la Palabra* [Missionary Servants of the Word]. He shares,

You might say that it was luck or chance or a coincidence that these three young people all came to our parish within a week or two, each feeling a stirring within her/himself to live as missionaries within their new context. In our faith tradition, however, we tend to attribute such happenings to a Higher Power: to the Holy Spirit!

Father Mattingly saw great potential in this group and flew to Mexico City to meet Father Luis Butero, the founder of the *Misioneros Servidores de la Palabra*. When he returned to Austin, Father Mattingly developed *Juventud Misionera*, an intensive formation program for young adults desiring to evangelize the Spanish-speaking community of Austin. The group began with grand ideals, hoping, for instance, to fill an arena in Austin with young adults in the same way that the *Misioneros Servidores de la Palabra* in Mexico yearly filled the 105,000-seat Aztec Stadium in Mexico City. The ministry was plagued by similar challenges as other Spanish-speaking youth ministries, however, and their annual *retiro masivo* [massive retreat] yearly attracted 200 to 600 youths.

By the time of his departure in 2006, Father Mattingly was employing a full-time Director of English-speaking Youth Ministry (Sr. M. Guadalupe Medina, F.M.A.), a full-time Director of Spanish-speaking Youth Ministry (Aarón Rodríguez, then Ángeles Godínez), and a part-time Street Minister (Jack Salazar). He had established various communities for undocumented youths who were interested in evangelization, and he had set in place a foundation for future youth ministry efforts in the parish and the diocese.

Bringing Latin American Traditions to Austin

In 1997, Antolín Aguirre and the *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey* prepared to take the second-annual Live Way of the Cross out into the neighborhood of East Austin. Father Mattingly and his staff also made the necessary preparations to celebrate Palm Sunday outdoors, at *Plaza Saltillo* (on the southwest corner of Comal and East Fifth Streets). Father Mattingly shares,

From my experience in Latin America, I knew that Holy Week was an important celebration in the *Latino* community, so I figured we had to celebrate it as best we could, with our limitations. Here in the U.S., for instance, people have to work all week. But Antolín wanted to take the Way of the Cross into the neighborhood, and I said, “Go for it.” The first year, we did it around the church and it lasted all of 40 minutes. Antolín said, “Next year, we’re going to do it different: We’re going to start at IH35.” So we began with Palm Sunday – which is nearly as important for Hispanics as Easter. Instead of proclaiming the passion, we prepared a dramatic representation. It wasn’t the passion, but it was enough to help people appreciate the idea and what we were beginning to celebrate during Holy Week. We were never able to solve our challenge with the sound system, but *Cristo Rey’s* celebration of Holy Friday kept growing and growing, until it was the largest in the city. The police estimated that some 5,000 to 6,000 people participated in the celebration. It would be right for me to take any credit: The people did all the work!

Father Mattingly recalls that the large celebrations that also surrounded Ash Wednesday – “the holiest moment of the year for *Latinos*,” when Father Mattingly boldly suggested that the ashes on people’s foreheads would not save them – and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

New Music and Décor for Cristo Rey

Father Mattingly recalls that *Cristo Rey’s* music was fortunate to have good music. He also has memories of new groups: Miguel Cabrera and a young man named Juan Carlos began providing music at the 7:00 a.m. Mass, which had previously hosted Robert Donley and

Tejano legend, Manuel “Cowboy” Donley, as long as they were able to play. “Those young people,” he says, “came to practice during the week, and they were faithful.”

Father Mattingly also remembers inviting a liturgical architect to the parish. He notes: “She shared various suggestions. She said, for instance, ‘This church is very lovely, but it has a lot of straight lines.’ It was her suggestion that we display Christ the King and Our Lady of Guadalupe at angles with the congregation, and that we hang draping banners.

Cristo Rey’s Influence on Diocesan Ministries

Father Mattingly notes that many movements that began at Cristo Rey often spread throughout the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin. The *Jornada Juvenil* (a Spanish retreat program for young adults) quickly became a diocesan ministry. Father Mattingly shares,

I never imagined the fruit it would bear. It brought large numbers of young people to the church. Many of them married and stayed active in the church. A man once commented, ‘If you want a girlfriend, go to the bar. If you want a wife, go to church.’ That seemed true with the *Jornada Juvenil*!

Father Mattingly remembers the challenge of finding supports for the Spanish-speaking young people of Cristo Rey. “We talked about connecting them with Mexico, but that didn’t work due to immigration issues. So we connected them with groups in Houston and Fort Worth. They helped us and kept us moving forward.”

Cristo Rey’s *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* (Christian Family Movement) and *Adoración Nocturna* (Nocturnal Adoration) quickly spread to several parishes. “The MFC was a mission of our community,” Father Mattingly says. “We sent couples to start groups in other parishes.”

Father Mattingly openly speaks of his philosophy for empowering people: “I had never heard of *Adoración Nocturna* at the time, but if a group of people came with a tradition from Mexico, I opened the doors to them. And I told them: ‘I’ll support you – but don’t think that I’m going to spend the night [in prayer] with you!’” He remembers,

“*Cristo Renueva Su Parroquia* [Christ Renews His Parish] came from the people, too. I don’t remember who – but I said, ‘Let’s do it!’”

The Legacy of Antolín Aguirre

Father Mattingly remembers with fondness the great amount of time shared by a young Mexican, Antolín Aguirre, with the Spanish-speaking youth ministries of the parish, including *Jornada Juvenil*, *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey*, *Misioneros Servidores de la Palabra*, and the parish’s *matlachines* (indigenous dancers to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe). Antolín balanced these commitments with his responsibilities as a husband, as the father of a high-energy household, and as a young entrepreneur who owned various *elote* trailers. Sadly, Antolín died of pancreatic cancer in 2019, and his wife, Mayita Ochoa, declined to be interviewed for this work, believing it to be in disobedience to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin. A feature on Antolín Aguirre as a model for service is included in the appendices of this work.

The Legacy of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Father Mattingly shares effusive praise for the Salesian Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. “They were incredible,” he says. He continues his “trip down Memory Lane”:

Their provincial knew our parish well, and she came for a few days each year to better understand our ministries. She sent us Sister Martina Ponce, a former superior and principal, who knew how to organize people. Sister Martina organized more than 100 teachers to instruct more than 1,000 kids! Sister Guadalupe Medina had special gifts for [working with] youth. She helped organize our *Jornada* and youth groups. She deserves an entire book! Her love for young people is incredible, and her dedication to them is without compare. Sister Theresa Murillo was assigned to our parish’s youth ministry, but she tried to take youth formation back to what it was before, so that wasn’t a good fit. I spoke with her provincial, who, fortunately, sent Sister Guadalupe back to us. Sister Irene Tapia was a good organizer. A former principal, she had nothing when she

came here—no computer, no secretary—but she didn’t complain, and she provided excellent formation for children and youth. Sister Jane Jasso *era una* [was a] sweetheart. There was none like her when it came to working with young children. She was here for some 13 years, and the people had a deep love for her. We would sometimes see Sister Jane Sánchez here, but she was assigned to Santa Julia, and not to Cristo Rey. Sister Angelita Guzmán was a great cook and fundraiser with great people skills. Sister Silvia Castillo was a very good organizer. After one year in the youth house, she was the first to have an office in the new *Escuelita*, with the parish’s first full-time religious education secretary. Sister Emma Stefanoni began to organize parents, providing them an excellent adult formation program and helping them to be better parents. She directed our *Catequesis Familiar* [Family Catechesis].

Daniel López similarly remembers:

Sister Theresa [Murillo] was like one of the tough nuns that you see in the movies, with a ruler. Sister Jane [Jasso] was a loving, caring person, Sister Irene [Tapia] oversaw C.C.D., and Sister Guadalupe [Medina] started the Youth R.O.C. in 1999. That was the year that I went to SYLC, the Salesian Youth Leadership Conference, in California, with Mike Nanyes, Elizabeth Castillo and Jackie Núñez. The following year, my brother [Adán López] attended SYLC with Nina Delgado and Christie Martínez. Jack Salazar also went in 2000. Sister [Guadalupe] brought Jack into Cristo Rey, and he worked with street youth. He tried to help those who were on probation to get back onto the right path.

René Salazar recalls the many volunteer opportunities provided by the nuns and staff at Cristo Rey. “A lot of my childhood was at Cristo Rey. If I wasn’t at home, I’d be at Cristo Rey,” he says. He remembers Sister Guadalupe as “a good leader, very precise about what she wanted, and very strict—but she probably had to be like that with us.”

Father Mattingly concludes, “I tell you: Those Sisters were the heart of the parish!”

Family Catechesis

Father Mattingly is credited with bringing Family Catechesis to Cristo Rey in 2000. He readily shares his praise:

Catequesis Familiar was my idea, but Sister Guadalupe [Medina] embraced the idea of offering catechesis for the entire family. By the time that the Salesians sent Sister Emma [Stefanoni], we had 125 children participating in religious education in this way. We began with a family activity in the parish hall, then we divided parents and various age groups of kids for instruction at their level. It was a lot of work, and we had to create the curriculum. Not enough English-speaking families showed up to justify the work we put into it, but the Spanish-speaking *Catequesis Familiar* really made people feel that this was *their* parish! For some people, it may have seemed unorganized, but it worked!

Father Mathias remembers the work involved in Family Catechesis. “Father Larry would gather us early in the week to discuss ideas. We’d settle on a theme for the evening, then we’d have until Friday evening to prepare our parts. With Father Larry and me and our three Salesian Sisters, we had five age-appropriate break-out groups on any given evening of Family Catechesis. It was really an inspired idea!”

The Cristo Rey Herald

In August 2000, Cristo Rey piloted a parish newspaper, *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* (*The Cristo Rey Herald*), which was published on a quarterly basis through 2005. A September 19, 2010 article in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* speaks of this effort:

Father Jayme Mathias recalls serving as the editor of the newspaper first during those first years. “It would easily take us forty hours to pull together each edition,” he remembers. He also marvels at the advances in technology during these ten years, particularly with respect to

photography, design and layout. “[In 2000], we took photos with a camera that recorded photos onto a floppy disk,” he says. It took forever just to download the photos from the camera to the computer!” At that time, Father Jayme composed much of the material for *The Cristo Rey Herald*, and the paper was translated to Spanish by Adriana Trujeque and Socorro Bernal. Father Jayme recalls the long nights of laying out the newspaper using Microsoft Publisher. The file for the newspaper was then saved to a floppy disk and hand-delivered to Marble Falls, where it was printed by Highland Publishing.

Helping Young People with Addictions

Father Mattingly recalls how he and Sister Guadalupe tried to help young men who were challenged by addictions to alcohol and drugs. He shares, “I had a special place in my heart for the young people who were here in the U.S. without their parents, without families. Many of them were alone, and I would ask them, ‘Why don’t you get involved in something good?’” He rented an upstairs apartment adjacent to the parish from Art Navarro, for young Spanish-speaking men who assisted with parish ministries, but those who struggled with addictions didn’t fit in there. In September 2003, he began inviting them to stay in the rectory.

Father Jayme Mathias recalls that, though he would continue to help Father Mattingly for 27 more months, it marked a fracture in their relationship. “Father Larry was a tremendous mentor in many ways,” he says, “and I will always hold him in the highest esteem.” He continues the story:

At that time, I was serving as Associate Pastor at Cristo Rey and as a teacher of Spanish at San Juan Diego Catholic High School, so I was often up late, “burning the midnight oil,” then arising early to prepare lesson plans. I’ll confess that I was a naïve, young priest, but what I witnessed in the rectory one October morning is something I will take to my grave, rather than cause grave scandal to the People of God. I froze in the moment. That evening, when I returned from school, I told Father Larry that if I had a car and a bank account, I would gladly leave [the rectory]. I had nothing.

I was a “poor” Franciscan Friar. When I returned from school the next day, Father Larry handed me a checkbook for an account with \$100 in it and told me to keep the keys of the car I was driving. I rented a bedroom from a Joy Group benefactor, and I’m guessing that few people knew that I “commuted” to Cristo Rey for the next two years. It certainly wasn’t the experience of community life that I had hoped to live as a young friar: but I tend to look at the bright side: That set off a weekly pilgrimage for me to our friary in San Antonio, where I could experience that community.

The Legacy of the Conventual Franciscan Friars

During Father Mattingly’s leadership of Cristo Rey, various Conventual Franciscan Friars resided at the friary at 2109 East Second Street, some of whom ministered at Cristo Rey.

Father John Elmer, O.F.M.Conv., who administered Cristo Rey during the months in 1995 leading up to the pastorate of Father Mattingly, remained at Cristo Rey for a few months of transition.

Brother Kerry Guillory, O.F.M.Conv., who came to Cristo Rey in 1991 remained until the fall of 2000.

Brother Jayme Mathias, O.F.M.Conv. came to Cristo Rey for a nine-month internship in youth ministry from August 1995 through May 2006. Ordained a deacon at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. in May, 2000, he returned to serve as an Associate Pastor at Cristo Rey from June 2000 until June 2006. Roy Gómez and Mary Ann Serrano of the St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group organized a busload of Cristo Rey parishioners who traveled to Deacon Jayme’s ordination to the priesthood on March 10, 2001, at the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Carey, Ohio. Father Jayme focused on honing his craft as a presider and preacher, oversaw the formation of liturgical ministries, piloted a parish newspaper, *El Herald de Cristo Rey*. He also revamped the parish’s baptismal preparation program and streamlined the celebration of parish baptisms, which numbered over 600 per year. He played the piano for the 12:00 p.m. English “Youth Mass,” and he oversaw *Club Cristo Rey*, an innovative transformation of the parish hall on a monthly basis into an alcohol-free dance club

for Spanish-speaking young adults, which included dramatic presentations of scriptural messages during breaks in music. “One cannot underestimate the impact of pastoral counseling and the sacrament of reconciliation for this community,” he says. He explains:

Father Larry and I would often be in meetings at the parish office from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m., often for pastoral counseling, and, because we decided to take turns being available and offering the sacrament of reconciliation before all Spanish weekend Masses, we spent a lot of time in the confessional—or under a tree in the front yard of the church, behind the *sarape*-covered screen that we used for our very-popular outdoor confessional!

Deacon Anders “Andrew” Jensen, O.F.M.Conv. served as a deacon at Cristo Rey from 1997 to 1998, when he was ordained to the priesthood and moved to another parish assignment. A native of Denmark, he studied the Spanish language while at Cristo Rey, and he is remembered for smoking his pipe on parish grounds, dressed in his grey Franciscan habit.

Brother John Mauer, O.F.M.Conv. resided at Cristo Rey in 2001-2002. The Conventual Franciscan Friars had the practice of assigning at least three friars to each friary, so the departure of Brother Kerry in 2001 necessitated the presence of another friar with Father Mattingly and Father Mathias. Brother John turned the friary garage into a workshop where he created handicrafts—including nativity sets and friar magnets—that he sold in the church’s gift shop and at church events. Father Mathias shares,

I greatly loved Brother John. He was a simple, humble and often joyful man. Despite having lost various fingertips, he occupied himself with learning to play the guitar. He also had a daily habit of making sandwiches for those in need, which he delivered to them on street corners while engaging them in conversation. I would take him out to dinner each Sunday evening, with the money that parishioners slipped to me after Mass. He really appreciated that, and I enjoyed the time with him. I still have one of his friar magnets, and a pattern that he used to

create it, which I use as a homily prop when I speak on what it means to be a model for others!”

After Brother John departed Cristo Rey in 2002, it would be nine years before the parish would again see three friars living together onsite.

When asked his memories of the friars with whom he ministered, Father Mattingly is curiously silent. Father Mathias explains,

Father Larry was a “lone wolf.” He enjoyed his alone time, and I would sometimes tiptoe through the living room to respect his TV time. There’s no doubt that serving as the provincial superior for 12 years really burnt him out on the friars. He and I prayed together for some months after Brother John’s departure, but he seemed very happy to live and serve alone, as a ‘diocesan priest.’ I can respect that.

The Deacons of Cristo Rey Catholic Church

During Father Mattingly’s leadership of Cristo Rey, he was assisted by various non-Franciscan deacons, including Deacon Guadalupe Medrano, Deacon Johnny Ojeda (1996), Deacon José Chávez (1998, 2000), Deacon Juan López (2000-2002), and Deacon Agapito López. Father Mattingly shares, “Deacons have an important ministry in the Church, but their formation in the Diocese of Austin at that time was apparently very poor.” He points to Deacon Agapito as an exception: “He was well-prepared in Chicago and was excellent in all he did. He preached well, and he worked with the *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano*. I knew what he was doing.”

Parish Staff at Cristo Rey Catholic Church

Father Mattingly recalls the parish staff when he arrived in 1995:

Mary Rivera did exactly what we were looking for in a receptionist: She welcomed people and treated them well. Diana Coy and Blanca Vallejo later worked well, too. As the parish grew, they oversaw our growing secretarial needs, like room reservations, sacramental documents, calls and complaints. They were very dedicated and prudent with respect to personal and private information. At first, we didn’t have the money to pay just salaries, but

by the time I left, we were paying just wages for a Catholic parish.

Father Mathias is happy to point out the lacunae in Father Mattingly's praises:

When I came to Cristo Rey in August 1995, shortly after Father Larry, I really fell in love with the dedication of our "office ladies"! Diana Coy was the backbone of parish operations at that time, a real steadying force during challenging times. Her daughter, Angie, was a technology wiz and helped to digitize parish sacramental records. Mary Rivera and Dorothy Portillo would later succeed them: Mary was a kind, soft-spoken and calming presence to all who came through the door, and Dorothy assisted with sacramental records and certificates. When Diana was no longer able to serve Cristo Rey, Blanca Vallejo brought great skills and an effervescent presence to Cristo Rey. We don't dare forget three particular parish staff members, though: Adel Camacho was our office administrator for some years at the end of Father Larry's leadership and was so efficient that I later hired her as my executive assistant as President at San Juan Diego Catholic College Preparatory School. Adel brought to Cristo Rey the great gifts of Natalie Reséndiz, whom I also hired as a future executive assistant. Adriana Trujeque served as our full-time religious education secretary for at least five years of Father Larry's service. A native of Mexico City, Adriana generously shared of her time to translate my homilies and my weekly article on spirituality in *El Mundo Newspaper*. When people ask how I learned Spanish, I readily credit Adriana over any university course or international experience I've had. I articulated my ideas in English, and she gave them back to me in Spanish, causing me to say, "Huh, that's how you say that in Spanish!"

The Legacy of Father Lawrence Mattingly

Because Father Mattingly was the second-longest pastor to serve Cristo Rey, it is more challenging to summarize his many

contributions to the parish community. Under his leadership, Cristo Rey possessed its first paid youth ministers and “street minister,” which resulted in several programs in English and Spanish. Cristo Rey welcomed new ministries: Family Catechesis, Youth R.O.C., *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey*, *Jornada Juvenil*, *Juventud Misionera*, *Adoración Nocturna* (Nocturnal Adoration), *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* (Christian Family Movement), *Cristo Renueva Su Parroquia* (Christ Renews His Parish),

Inside the church, he installed a new sound system, he removed the inner wooden doors of the narthex, to open the space, he hung posts for banners on the side walls and angled Cristo Rey and Our Lady of Guadalupe in front of the people, and he removed the eastward-facing pews from the Blessed Sacrament chapel, so that parishioners in that room could look south into the sanctuary for crowded Masses.

Father Mattingly led the expansion of the *Escuelita*, from the initial stages of planning and the removal of two houses from the parish’s lots on Mildred Street, through groundbreaking, to completion. He co-founded La FUENTE Learning Center inside the *Escuelita*, which blossomed during his leadership.

Rita (Navarro) Cuevas remembers, “We were very close to Father Larry. He was excellent, excellent, excellent.” She recalls with fondness how Father Larry did not exclude her and her husband, Louis, from the sacraments of the Church. She concludes “He was committed to Cristo Rey, and he was a wonderful shepherd. They don’t make priests like him anymore.”

The Departure of the Conventual Franciscan Friars

In July 2005, the Conventual Franciscan Friars of the Province of Our Lady of Consolation gathered for their quadrennial Provincial Chapter and Assembly, where, recognizing that they had a friary with a single friar, they voted to withdraw from Austin. Father Mathias notes the poor timing: “I was just asked by Bishop Aymond the week before, to serve as President of his new high school [San Juan Diego Catholic College Preparatory School], and I was very dedicated to him – so I didn’t feel that I could leave. I decided to remain in Austin.”

Father Mattingly was also not thrilled by the news of the friars’ lack of commitment to the community of Cristo Rey. He shares,

I was just beginning to form a group of Secular Franciscans [at Cristo Rey]. When I found out that that I'd be leaving, I began to withdraw from the parish. The thought of leaving was depressing—since those people were part of me! I began to prepare them for their next pastor, and I didn't want anyone to speak ill of what we had done—which is exactly what my successor began to do the moment he stepped foot at Cristo Rey. He really ran me off. He began moving in furniture before I had left. I had to tell him, "Please don't move anything else until I'm gone." He never asked a single question about the parish or what we had done during the previous 11 years, so I left. I have this idea that the parish belongs to the people, and that the priests just come to work with them—not vice versa. After everything is said and done, the parish belongs to the people.

Socorro (García) Bernal describes the pastorate of Father Mattingly as "the rebirth of a church: the awakening of a giant [the Spanish-speaking community] from sleep." She continues, "After Father Larry, we [the Spanish-speaking community] are kings and queens at Cristo Rey. The Mexican Americans fear we are taking over. Their pain is obvious, and this pains me. It pains me that we [the Spanish-speaking community] are so big. I love Mexican Americans. I have friends and acquaintances at all [weekend] Masses. They are hurting." Socorro suggested that this was perhaps most obvious during a recent retreat of the parish's liturgical ministers, when various English-speaking ministers refused to participate, purportedly because the retreat was bilingual (English/Spanish), rather than solely in English.

Father Mattingly also taught parishioners to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. This was important to Socorro (García) Bernal, who shares that after her grandchildren arrived, causing a hiatus in her fifteen-year practice of attending daily Mass, she could resort to praying the Liturgy of the Hours at home.

Socorro also recalls the late-night hours spent making last-minute banners for the church, liturgical vestments for the priests, and translations for the parish newspaper. She says, "Father Jayme would call at 9:00 p.m., saying 'Can you do a quick translation before you go to bed?' At 1:00 a.m., we would still be translating at my dining room

table!" With satisfaction, though, she recalls the products of their labor: the many articles and editions of the newspaper, vestments which are still holding up ten years later, and the sight of Plaza Saltillo (on the southwest corner of Comal and East Fifth Streets) decked in red for the parish's annual Live Way of the Cross.

Chapter Thirteen

Unlucky Thirteen: The Mexican Community is Chased from Cristo Rey

“I was a thirteen-year-old boy for thirty years.”
Mickey Rooney

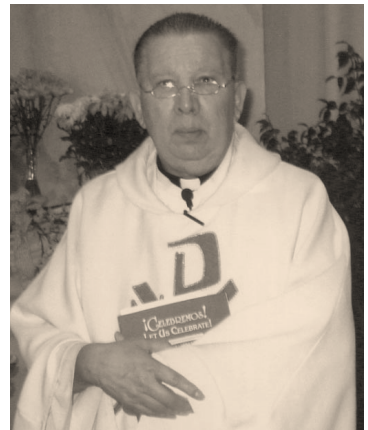
“This is *my* parish!”
Rev. Jesse Evans Euresti

“Unhappiness in a child accumulates
because he sees no end to the dark tunnel.
The 13 weeks of a term might just as well be 13 years.”
Graham Greene

“I saw Father Jesse as a corrupt person who hated my people.
He did things that I consider to be unforgiveable.”
René Salazar

The Thirteenth Pastor

In numerology, twelve is a number of completeness. The clock contains twelve hours. The calendar year consists of twelve months. Israel had twelve tribes, and Jesus had twelve apostles. Father Larry Mattingly served as the twelfth pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, and, while his service to the parish lasted just under twelve years (viz., 10 years and 8 months), most parishioners consider themselves fortunate to have known and been served by him. This seems to be less true of his successor.



Fr. Jesse Euresti.

In some cultures, thirteen is considered an irregular or unlucky number. Thirteen persons gathered for the Last Supper, and death ensued. According to one legend, it was on the thirteenth day of the month of October in 1307 when King Philip IV of France and Pope Clement V arrested, tortured and burned at the stake the last thirteen Knights Templar. Just as quickly did the thirteenth pastor of the Cristo Rey community seek to burn at the stake all that his predecessor had worked to build up over the previous eleven years.

The Homecoming

Chapter six of the present work recounts the entrance of the young Jesse Evans Euresti into seminary life and formation. Now looking toward the end of his priestly career, Father Euresti was looking forward to spending the last six years of his active priestly ministry as pastor of his home parish in Lower East Austin.

As pastor, Father Euresti arrived at Cristo Rey in time to celebrate his first Mass on the evening of January 31, 2006, the Feast of St. John Bosco. During his first homily, during a liturgy that would otherwise be focused on the Salesian Sisters and their founder, he repeated six times: “*Ésta es mi parroquia*” (This is *my* parish), with a certain emphasis on the word “my” that made all present feel extremely uncomfortable.

Parishioners remember recall his arrival at Cristo Rey earlier that morning. Because there was no priest, Sister Martina Ponce led a communion service at the time of the early-morning Mass. Dressed in a *guayabera*, and thus not being identifiable as a priest, Father Euresti entered the church and snarled, “This is the last time that this parish will have a communion service!” Sister Martina politely inquired, “And who are you?” He replied, “I’m Father Jesse! And I’m the new pastor here!”

Four days later, during his first weekend Masses at the parish, Father Euresti exerted his influence over the parish by changing the way in which liturgical processions had been performed (according to diocesan norms) for years. It was also the beginning of an era of 75-minute Masses, during which people often joked that he would read the bulletin. Within a few months, all liturgical ministries were nearly decimated, with only a handful of altar servers, for instance, able to work with the priest.

Louis Cuevas remembers,

When we heard that Father Jesse was coming home, we were excited – but after a few times of attending his Masses, we quickly grew disenchanted with him and his style of preaching. He seemed very self-centered. It was all about him. Even though I grew up at Cristo Rey, that’s when we started attending different churches.

Louis’ wife, Rita (Navarro) Cuevas, similarly shares:

I remember how glad we were, thinking that someone from the community was coming home to serve. We thought it was a good thing. But then we saw how arrogant he was – really the opposite of Father Larry. He was not a shepherd. He was interested in his own needs, and some of his decisions were “out in left field.”

Leonard Gonzales recalls:

Everyone was hyped because he was a priest from the neighborhood, but he had a different way of teaching that didn’t appeal to me. I wouldn’t go when he was giving the sermon. He scolded me once, in front of everyone, for taking photos in the church. He just had different values and teachings.

Diana Coy remembers:

He angered a lot of people. He told them that they couldn’t be ministers in the church if they weren’t married by the church. He told them, “You can’t go to Confession” and “You can’t go to Communion” and “You can do nothing!” He took a lot of stuff away from people. It upset a lot of people in the church, and they started going to other churches. He was something else.

The Suffering Caused by Father Jesus

Father Euresti’s unyielding military personality was felt throughout the community. Though he translated his name as *Jesús* in Spanish, most people viewed him as the antithesis of the spirit of

Jesus of Nazareth. Longtime parish leader Socorro (García) Bernal remembers: “We felt rejection by him from the beginning. He insisted, ‘This is *my* parish.’ He was an authoritarian, with no respect for human beings – *y no tenía freno en la lengua* (his tongue had no brakes). But I can’t speak ill of him now that he’s dead.” Socorro also recalls the various lapses in Father Jesse’s “Tex Mex,” and the way in which he ended each sentence with “¿eh?”, noting, for instance, the reaction among Spanish-speaking parishioners when he repeatedly said on Holy Thursday, “*Vamos a lavarnos los pieses, ¿eh?*” (We’re going to wash our feetses, eh?) Socorro shares that Father Euresti offended many people by suggesting that the Mexican people were like cockroaches, scurrying to the church for sacraments, then disappearing. She concludes: “When Father Larry left, I cried with one eye, but when Father Jesse came, I cried with both eyes. We suffered a lot, and we united our sufferings with the people of the nations from which we come.” Roy Gómez remembers: “We created a list of complaints for the diocese: He called people cockroaches, he chased people out of the confessional. He even chased one woman all the way to her car! Things like that were really aggravating.”

The tension between the pastor and the community came to a head on Palm Sunday 2006. For ten years, the Spanish-speaking community of the parish celebrated the 10:00 a.m. Palm Sunday liturgy at Plaza Saltillo, where they reenacted Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem atop a donkey. An hour before the service, Father Euresti announced that he would celebrate Mass at the church for anyone who showed up there, while Father Mathias would celebrate with those who showed up for the outdoor celebration at Plaza Saltillo. When Father Mathias heard the news at Plaza Saltillo, he responded, “This makes no sense: We’re dividing this community!” He suggested that all present at the plaza march together to the church to celebrate Mass with their pastor, but the congregation would not hear of it. This was *their* celebration of Palm Sunday. Now able to joke about the events of that day, Father Mathias shares, “It was the only Mass I’ve ever celebrated without a chalice.” Five minutes before the Mass in the plaza was to begin, Father Euresti sent Eucharistic Ministers to the plaza to gather up all the communion cups for his use back at the church. The following week, as the Church prepared to celebrate the new life of Easter, Father Mathias shared that he could no longer work with the new pastor, and that he had

chosen instead to dedicate himself full-time to his ministry as President of San Juan Diego Catholic High School in South Austin.

Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse remembers:

Father Jesse was really somewhere else, in a different world, and we bore the brunt of it. I can handle a lot of emotional pain without lashing out, and I refuse to be as horrendous as those who hurt me. I kept my distance from him, so that I wouldn't offend him as he offended me. Ultimately, he sent me a letter stating that my services were no longer required on the Finance Council. That was painful, and I had to reassess my efforts. It was about that time that a great unhappiness arose at Cristo Rey, a vortex of horrible, black, ugly feelings at the church.

Dolores "Dottie" Chapa recalls: "When my mom was sick and dying, she told me, 'Do not let that man do my [funeral] Mass.'" Her son, Marcos, adds, "There's a slim chance I'll get into heaven, so I want to keep that—but the best thing that I can say about Father Jesse is that he had the greatest associate pastor: Father Jayme!"

Questionable Decisions

During this time of exile, in which the Cristo Rey community showed great resilience, Father Euresti made numerous decisions that caused wonderment. He ran La FUENTE Learning Center off parish property and removed the brass letters reading La FUENTE from the new parish facility. Unable to pay the annual mortgage on the *Escuelita*, he refinanced the mortgage, extending it an additional ten years. Unable to pay the facility's electric bill, he ordered the parish staff to remove nearly two-thirds of the light bulbs from the building, as a cost-saving measure. The building would sit dark and empty for the next three years.

Father Euresti purchased a \$230,000 double-wide trailer that he moved onto the parking lot just west of the parish hall, to be the new parish office, thus consolidating all offices previously located in the houses at 2110 East Second (the previous parish office) and 2201 East 2½ Street (the previous youth ministry house). To reduce expenses, Father Euresti also moved the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians onto parish property: He located their convent at 2109 East Second

Street, and he took up residence at the old Social Ministry office, at 2107 East Second Street.

Father Euresti shuffled parish staff, bringing in Mary Ann Serrano as parish administrator, Carmen Hernandez as receptionist, and Carmelo Tovar for maintenance. The most controversial decision, though, was his hire of Gavino Fernandez, Jr. as his “personal assistant,” and all the cars in the neighborhood were flyered for a few Sundays, to alert parishioners that a man imprisoned for such felonies as aggravated assault with a deadly weapon (against undocumented immigrants) and possession of cocaine now “has access to your [parish] records!” Father Euresti gave Gavino the largest office in the new double-wide, taking the small, southwest corner office for himself – for the little time that he spent at the parish.

The Bishop of Austin Steps In

The tension between the pastor and the community continued to boil. The congregation was clamoring to the bishop for the pastor’s removal. Diocesan officials were sent to the parish in an attempt to appease parishioners. Parishioners went public with the way in which they believed the pastor had “manhandled” their children who ministered as altar servers, and the story was picked up by various television news channels.

Finally, Bishop Gregory Aymond intervened in the Cristo Rey debacle, calling a meeting at his office with Father Jesse and a handful of selected staff and community members. Several parishioners, however, descended on the chancery for the event: some praying for the bishop and pastor in the chancery chapel, others hosting a news conference outside. It was not a pleasant day, and Roy Gómez still recalls the excoriating and threatening words of Bishop Aymond whom, Roy says, came into the chapel and insisted that all leave at once. He continues:

There were about eight of us [in the meeting], and we were disappointed. In fact, it may have been the biggest disappointment that many of us encountered. We realized that the bishop had to protect his priests and say that whatever they were doing was fine. Apart from his ministry, he was not a good administrator, and we could already tell that our finances were “going south.” It was a

boiling point – but then Father Jesse was killed shortly after that.

Memories of Father Rito Dávila

During 2007, Father Rito Dávila, from Nicaragua, served as Associate Pastor of the Cristo Rey community. He is credited with initiating a weekly Thursday evening Mass and time of eucharistic adoration led by the young adults of the diocesan *Juventud Misionera* movement. Father Dávila would later compose an extended reflection that helps to illuminate the spirit of the parish at that time. He shared:

In 2007, during my first year of priestly ministry in the Diocese of Austin, I had the opportunity to serve as associate pastor of Cristo Rey Parish. During that year, Father Jesse Euresti led the parish as its pastor. At that time, I found [Cristo Rey] to be a parish preoccupied by its many problems, but in their hearts [the people] had a great faith and readiness to work for the good of their parish, and a desire to be heard. I don't believe, however, that there was sufficient support [by the pastor], and various aspects [of parish life] became fragmented, leading to a feeling of division within the heart of the parish. The people of Cristo Rey possess great virtue. They are very faithful to their Church and to their faith and to their priests, when [these priests] give themselves in service to the community. As associate pastor at that time, the only thing I could do was listen to the pain of the community, accompany them as a priest in their daily struggles, provide hope, and show the loving face of the Church to them. I remember difficult moments. I did not feel welcomed by the parish's administration. I could not count on the fulfillment of such basic needs as a place in which to live and an office in which to work. I always felt like a stranger in the parish, and I couldn't get to know the people better because I didn't live there. I had to live at Sacred Heart Parish, and I had to travel across the town each day in order to serve the community. I also regret that at times respect was not shown to me [by the parish's administration], neither as a priest, nor as a human being. They were very easily

irritated and offended, and without a willingness to listen. There was never a fraternal spirit in our staff meetings, and no one took ownership of anything that was happening. On various occasions, [staff members] would look to shift the blame and take no responsibility themselves, which led to chaos. The parish community and the parish's administration were two polar opposites that were impossible to reconcile, perhaps owing to the lack of respect for others. More emphasis was placed on the fulfillment of rules than on respect for human dignity. Personally, I believe that when rules no longer serve the common good, they lose their value. Sometimes justice was preached, but it was never lived. A clear message was never spoken to the parish, nor was a clear pastoral plan outlined, which could have indicated how better to integrate [the parish's] various ministries. At times, the wrong decisions were made, and those most affected were those humblest of people who, with complete good will, desired to serve the parish community: the Salesian Sisters. They experienced suffering in a very real way, and they were criticized for being faithful to the truth. I believe that it was they who kept faith and hope alive in the community. They enjoy my admiration, appreciation and respect for their constancy and faithfulness to God and His Church.

Through the Eyes of a Young Man

René Salazar had always been active in his parish community – until the arrival of Father Euresti. At age 15, he wrote an essay about the sadness he felt at not being able to feel at home at Cristo Rey. René's father came from Mexico to the United States at age 15, and his mother came at age 21, such that René is proud of the cultural heritage of his family. The following excerpt from a work he entitled "*Mi Autobiografía* [My Autobiography]" (2007) exposes his doubts and hopes.

There's one memory I'll never be able to forget. A new priest came to Cristo Rey Catholic Church. His name was Father Jesse. Father Larry had left the church. He was a person of justice and truth. In contrast, I saw Father Jesse

as a corrupt person who hated my people. He did things that I consider to be unforgiveable. The important thing [that I learned] is that the snake [viz., Satan] is everywhere, even in the Church. After that, my family and I moved to Santa Cruz Parish in Buda....Later, we moved to St. Anthony Parish. I had to go with them; I didn't have a choice....My mother always told me, "When you feel trapped, pray to God, and never stop fighting for justice....Thanks to my mother, my spiritual life has always been strong. But because of the problems in our church, because of our parish, even my mother has expressed some doubt in our faith. Now I find myself confused as well, but I don't want to lose my faith. I know that our parish will survive. It will be the paradise that it was before.

René's mother, Margarita (Hernández) Salazar, refers to the pastorate of Father Euresti as "going back to my childhood, and remembering my aggressive father. [Father Euresti] looked at you and expected to do things his way, to obey him." Margarita's sister, Guillermina (Hernández) Álvarez simply states, "I stopped going to church. During the time that [Father Euresti] was there, I didn't go back to Cristo Rey." Margarita captures the feelings of many people who left Cristo Rey during those years:

Our children no longer wanted to go to Mass or to serve. Even as adults, we were asking ourselves, "Why should we go?" [Father Euresti] said he didn't need us, so we left, and we all went to different churches, but [Cristo Rey] was our church. We didn't feel at home at other churches.

The Parish's Financial Situation Exposed

A turning point for the parish occurred on January 1, 2009, when Bishop Gregory Aymond asked Father Jayme Mathias to serve as Associate Pastor and Pastor Designate for Cristo Rey Catholic Church. As such, Father Mathias would become pastor of the parish upon the retirement of Father Euresti on June 1, 2009. During Father Mathias' first weekend back at Cristo Rey, Father Euresti announced that it would take a miracle for the parish to meet its annual debt obligation in a few weeks. To do so, Father Euresti seized the funds of all parish

groups and ministries, and he paid the parish's monthly bills with monies from the parish's Social Ministry fund, which were given to the parish for the purpose of serving the poor and those in need.

Father Mathias remembers, "[Father Euresti] was never around. He'd celebrate weekend Masses, then speed off to Nuevo Laredo on Monday morning, returning in time for the Thursday evening Mass – unless there was a funeral stipend to be collected during the week."

In his absence from the parish, Father Euresti appointed Father Mathias as Financial Administrator of the parish on January 22, 2009, with "full authority to make any necessary decisions to ameliorate the financial health of this community." Father Euresti also tasked Father Mathias with working with the diocese in light of the parish's inability to meet its annual debt payment.

As Financial Administrator, Father Mathias was surprised by what he soon began to discover. The parish's financial records were inaccurate—with the 2008 profit/loss statement, for instance, showing a \$120,000 profit, which was far from the reality. Instead, the parish was unable to pay \$54,000 of its cathedraticum (the diocesan tax), and \$28,000 for property insurance in 2008. He remembers,

The parish's finances were a mess. There were no internal controls. The staff member overseeing finances had no background in or understanding of finances. Another staff member was accused of stealing from parish collections, and various parishioners said they would not give as long as that person remained employed by the parish. The Finance Council had not seen a financial statement in over six months, so members were unaware of the parish's financial state. And when Father Jesse convened the Financial Council on January 6, without any financial reports to share, the most pressing matter for discussion was the parish's need to find four Sunday breakfast groups during the coming months – which would result in some \$4,000 at most!

Father Mathias initiated an audit by the Diocese of Austin of the parish's finances and financial controls. He also educated the Finance Council to its responsibilities, to all diocesan finance policies, and to the expectations that they should have of parish leadership.

A breaking point came when Father Euresti convened the Finance Council on February 6. Father Mathias noted that the Quarter 3 report for July-September 2008 had finally been prepared by parish staff—but was woefully inaccurate. The parish was carrying \$14,000 in credit card debt, \$12,000 of which was amassed by the pastor with no receipts. The previous day, in violation of diocesan policy, Father Euresti had made a 0% loan of \$1,400 to a parishioner, without documentation.

Father Mathias remembers one especially tense moment during that meeting, when the Finance Council questioned the pastor about \$12,000 in expenses on the parish's credit card, for which there existed no receipts:

[Father Euresti] insisted that the balance on his parish credit card was nowhere near \$12,000. I couldn't stand the lies any longer: I stood up and walked out of the meeting. I hustled to the parish office and returned two minutes later with his credit card statements. I passed them around the table [to the Finance Council members], and [Father Euresti] was boiling with anger.

As a result of that meeting, the Finance Council asked to meet with the pastor again in three days. When he didn't appear, they moved their meeting to El Azteca Restaurant on East Seventh Street, where they drafted a letter demanding that the pastor resign by March 31 for his mismanagement of parish funds. It then held on to the letter.

Blow Up in the Parish Office

On the morning of February 21, Father Mathias received a phone call from the parish's bookkeeper, Mary Ann Serrano. She was crying. She explained that the pastor had just yelled at her, berating her for no apparent reason. Father Mathias hung up the phone and dialed the pastor's personal assistant, Gavino Fernández, Jr., to request an immediate appointment with the pastor. Father Mathias invited Ernest Treviño of the parish's Finance Council to be present at the meeting as well.

Ernest Treviño later typed and shared the following incident report, to capture the events that followed.

Situation at the Cristo Rey Office

Ernest Trevino

2/21/2009

To whom it may concern,

Fr. Jayme asked me to write about what happened today at the Cristo Rey office. I like Fr. Jesse and I consider him a friend. I am a member of the finance council and have supported him through some tough times.

Unfortunately as a result of Fr. Jayme's discussions with the diocese, our finance council became aware of the financial problems we have as a parish. Fr. Jesse scheduled a finance council meeting and then didn't show up. Fr. Jayme told us about such things happening with our finances as bills not being paid in 2008, a big balance on Fr. Jesse's credit card for expenses that aren't accounted for, and Fr. Jesse's making loans to parishioners. Our finance council has not seen parish finance statements for many months. After Fr. Jayme left that meeting, we discussed what we should do since we are responsible to the diocese for parish finances.

We decided to write a letter to Fr. Jesse asking him to explain these things. Our finance council met again to write a letter to him. We wrote that for the sake of the parish if he can't explain these things it will be better for him to retire early so that we can move forward as a parish and try to figure out what we're going to do about our financial situation.

This morning Mary Ann Serrano told me that Fr. Jesse yelled at her, and that Elisa Rendon told Gavino Fernandez, who told Fr. Jesse about the letter we had written him about our financial situation. I spoke with Barbara Rivera, the chair of our finance council, and we decided we should share our letter with Fr. Jesse today, rather than wait until Sunday. Barbara couldn't be with us, but Fr. Jayme wanted to talk to Fr. Jesse about what upset Mary Ann and I was going to give him the letter from our finance council.

I went to Fr. Jayme's office for our meeting with Fr. Jesse. Fr. Jayme told me he wanted us to meet in a neutral place rather than in [Fr. Jesse's office]. When Fr. Jesse finally came, he said, "Come into my office." Fr. Jayme said, "We should look for a neutral place to meet." Fr. Jesse said, "We will meet in my office!" Fr. Jayme said, "We should meet in a neutral place." Fr. Jesse began to yell, "You will come into my office! I am the pastor! I am your boss! You report to me, and you will listen to me! You don't run this parish! I do!"

Fr. Jayme would not meet in his office. He said we were trying to help Fr. Jesse. Fr. Jesse yelled something back. Fr. Jayme pulled the diocesan phone book off his shelf. Fr. Jesse said, "Go ahead, call the diocese!" Fr. Jayme and I looked at each other. Fr. Jesse yelled at Fr. Jayme and said to call the diocese, and Fr. Jayme did. He left a message. Fr. Jesse went into his office and made a phone call. He said "I am writing a letter of insubordination and you will sign it, and Ernest will witness it. And you are no longer the financial administrator of this parish." Fr. Jayme said he would write a letter saying that we tried to talk to Fr. Jesse and work with Fr. Jesse but that he wouldn't listen to us and refused to talk to us, and Ernest will witness it.

Fr. Jayme said, "We only want to help you." Fr. Jesse yelled, "Who does Mary Ann work for?" Fr. Jayme said, "the parish." Fr. Jesse said, "No, she works for me! Who do you work for?" Fr. Jayme said, "the parish and the bishop." Fr. Jesse yelled, "No, you work for me! You all work for me!"

Fr. Jesse started saying the things he didn't like about Fr. Jayme. That Fr. Jayme was going to pull out the rose bushes he planted. That Fr. Jayme asked for Carmen's resignation. That Fr. Jayme had a meeting of parish leaders, and they changed the date of the ministry fair. That Fr. Jesse didn't want to be pushed out. Fr. Jayme said, "We're not trying to push you out, but the Finance Council has a lot of questions for you."

I talked about the loans he made to parishioners and the financial situation we're in and how we want to work for a smooth transition from Fr. Jesse to Fr. Jayme. He said "I'm the boss! I'm the pastor! This is my parish! Y'all report to me, and I'm not going to be forced out!" He said "I need to talk to the bishop and clarify the position of pastor." He said, "If I correct staff, it's none of your business because they work for me and you work for me!"

Fr. Jayme read parts from the diocesan book on loans to parishioners and credit cards. Fr. Jesse said the parishioner gave the papers he needed to receive the check and that Mary Ann was going to write a loan contract. Fr. Jesse said the credit card expenses are nobody's business.

Fr. Jayme talked about Fr. Jesse not being around the parish very much and that he has already used his vacation days for the year. Fr. Jesse said it's no one's business how much time he's at the parish or not.

We talked for almost an hour. Fr. Jesse agreed to meet the Finance Council on Monday night. He said "I don't want problems. I just want to be left alone, but I'm in charge! I can do anything I want! I don't have to listen to you! I'm an irremovable pastor, and not even the bishop can remove me! I can sue the diocese, and he knows that! I can also sue the parish! Everyone hired here works for me, not for the parish!"

After the talk when Fr. Jesse came back to Fr. Jayme's office he gave him a letter of insubordination. He said, "I want you to sign this." Fr. Jayme said, "Do you really want to escalate this?" Fr. Jesse said "No." Fr. Jayme said, "Do you want me to serve as financial administrator, or no?" Fr. Jesse said, "Go ahead, but I'm going to tell Mary Ann that she works for me. She reports to me. She needs to do what I tell her to do."

That was the end of our conversation.

Father Mathias clearly remembers the events of that morning. He says,

It was the only letter of insubordination I've ever received, but I was not going to play Father Jesse's games. When he started yelling, my adrenaline started pumping, and I decided that, for the sake of our parish and our staff, I was going to stand up to the 'playground bully.' It was rather invigorating!"

The Demand for the Pastor's Resignation

On that same morning, Ernest shared with Father Euresti the letter that the Finance Council had written on February 17. The entire letter follows:

February 17, 2009

Dear Fr. Jesse,

As your Finance Council, we regret you chose to absent yourself from the Finance Council meeting you scheduled for February 9, 2009. As a council, we serve as your consultors, such that, without your presence, there is no need for us to gather. Further, your absence from the meeting suggests that our present financial state is not your concern.

Fr. Jayme was present at our meeting as your financial administrator for the parish. While he attempted to present the parish's financial state in the most favorable light, we are left to conclude that you have mismanaged this parish through your lack of leadership.

As a Finance Council, we were surprised to hear of the grave financial situation in which we find ourselves, and we regret that you were not present at the meeting to provide your perspective on the events leading to our present financial state.

When the conversation at our meeting turned toward your lack of leadership in our parish, Fr. Jayme recused himself and excused himself from the room. As a result of our subsequent conversation, we would like to propose the following offer.

As a Finance Council, we agree to pay you through May 31, 2009, regardless of your continued services to our parish. Further, if you retire effective March 31, 2009, we are prepared to dismiss your responsibility for the debt amassed during your time as pastor, including the \$12,000 of credit card charges for which you have yet to submit receipts. If you retire effective March 31, 2009, we will also relieve you of responsibility for a zero-percent interest loan of \$800 which you made to a parishioner from parish funds, which has yet to be repaid.

If you retire effective March 31, 2009, we agree to not publicly speak of your financial mismanagement of our parish, and we agree to work with leaders of our parish ministries to organize a fitting farewell celebration to honor your service to us as pastor.

If you choose not to retire by March 31, 2009, we will pursue a conversation with the Diocese of Austin concerning your mismanagement of our parish community. We will also expect to receive from you the necessary credit card receipts for the credit card debt you amassed, and a signed agreement for repayment of the loan of \$800 from the parishioner.

If you are not able to do this, we will be happy to pursue a conversation with the Diocese about having these expenses deducted from remaining paychecks and/or of placing them on your annual W-2 as income earned from our parish.

As a Finance Council, we will await your response, such that we know in which way we should act. We request a response to our request by March 15, 2009.

Sincerely,

The Finance Council of Cristo Rey Catholic Church
Barbara Rivera (Chair), Ernest Treviño, Helen Morales,
Elisa Montoya Rendón, Benjamin Villafuerte

The Pastor Disappears

In the end, the unlucky number was not 13, but 31. March 31 was the day by which the parish's Finance Council had demanded Father Euresti's resignation, and he was not willing to grant them that pleasure. On the night of Monday, March 30, after hearing evening confessions at St. Theresa Catholic Church, Father Euresti set out for his home on Guerrero Street in downtown Nuevo Laredo, where he arrived in the early hours of Tuesday, March 31. Diocesan Vicar Michael Mulvey, now the Roman Catholic Bishop of Corpus Christi, remembers that Father Euresti asked him that Monday evening at St. Theresa about the diocese's retirement benefits.

Father Euresti spoke with his sister, Rachel Ríos, around 2:30 a.m., as he prepared to cross into Mexico; by sunrise, she was increasingly concerned that her brother was not answering her repeated calls. She summoned her family for a quick trip down to the border, only to find blood covering the walls of her brother's bedroom. Father Mathias remembers,

We received a horrifying report from Rachel. By noon, Ernest and I had gathered water, food and items that Father Jesse's family might need in such a moment of need, and we hit the road to Nuevo Laredo. The police let us into the home, which was still a crime scene. We comforted Rachel and her family. Crying, Rachel led us to the bedroom Father Jesse and Manuel, where arcs of spattered blood reached high up each wall, making clear that this was the scene of a gruesome crime. The trail of blood led from the bedroom to the garage. Rachel paused at the washing machine, to show us where a blood-stained kitchen knife was found, wrapped in a cloth. We met the neighbor who investigated the open garage door earlier in the morning and who, upon seeing all the blood, called the police.

Back in Austin, the parish immediately commenced a *novenario*, nine days of hope-filled prayer for Father Euresti's well-being. During the subsequent five days, the media descended on Cristo Rey, chronicling the community's astonishment over its missing pastor. On the evening of Palm Sunday, April 5, 2009, Father Euresti's body

was found along the Anahuac Highway outside of downtown Nuevo Laredo. The Cristo Rey community prepared to welcome home the pastor's body and celebrate his Mass of Resurrection with Bishop Aymond and some 45 priests on Wednesday evening, April 8. The grieving of the community was cut short by the great activity of Easter Triduum celebrations beginning the next evening.

Manuel Martín Torres Saldaña, the young man who lived with the pastor at his Nuevo Laredo home, later confessed to the murder, saying he acted in self-defense in response to a threat by the pastor during an argument. News coverage of the event included many details confirmed by local sexologist Jorge Huerta, but denied in full by Bishop Aymond during a press conference. Torres Saldaña was sentenced to 37.5 years in a federal prison in Mexico. Reporting Torres Saldaña's confession, Kay Ebeling of the *Examiner* wrote:

The caretaker brutally murders the aging priest, stabs him with a machete and a knife, dumps the body on top of a mattress in a junk heap. Days later, he calls the priest's family, demanding they wire him money at a very public place in South Mexico, as good as turning himself in. He's arrested, and in front of the news media makes a terse confession, loosely translated: "We were lovers for more than a year. I was stoned and drunk when I killed him."

Ross Hansen of the Associated Press similarly reported,

A shocking twist in the murder of a Texas priest: The man who has confessed to Father Jesse Euresti's murder claims they were involved in a sexual relationship. Manuel Martín Torres Saldaña was arrested after calling Euresti's family and demanding money for information on the whereabouts of his body. The Catholic priest vanished about a week ago, when he left Austin, Texas for the Mexican border town of Nuevo Laredo, to fix up his retirement home. Torres Saldana worked as a caretaker at the house. He told reporters he was angry that the priest had kicked him out. Police were called to the Mexican residence when a neighbor noticed a trail of blood leading from the garage to the bedroom. Bloodstains and a bloody knife were found inside the home. Euresti's body was

found dumped along the highway. Authorities say it appeared he had been stabbed several times with a machete. The 69-year-old priest was planning to move to Nuevo Laredo upon his retirement in July.

The *World-Wide Religious News* also reported:

The caretaker of a Texas priest's home in Nuevo Laredo admitted Tuesday to killing the 69-year-old reverend and said the two were intimately involved. Manuel Martin Torres told police and reporters during a news conference that he stabbed and attacked Rev. Jesse Euresti with a machete after learning the priest was kicking him out of the home. Torres said he had demanded Euresti pay him between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Torres said he had been seeing the priest for the past year, and he would visit him every Monday in Nuevo Laredo. He said Euresti had recently met someone else. "I was so angry," Torres said. "How is it possible that after using me for so long, he was going to give me a kick in the butt?"

From Villain to Saint

Father Mathias notes how the brutal execution of the former pastor quickly transformed him into a saint. Ernest Treviño, who only days earlier had cried for the resignation of the priest, now made large buttons with the priest's image, for all in attendance at his funeral. Many parishioners would no longer speak ill of him, now that he was dead. Father Euresti's former personal assistant also soon made it his personal mission to petition the Austin City Council to rename East Second Street in memory of the slain priest.

The Caged Bird Sings

In 2011, after serving as pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, Father Jayme Mathias wanted to meet his predecessor's murderer. He took a bus to the correctional facility in Altamira, Tamaulipas, where Manuel Martín Torres Saldaña agreed to speak with him for a recorded interview in the prison yard. Father Mathias shares:

I was profoundly moved by the experience. Manuel was very forthcoming about his relationship with Father Jesse, whom he met during his lunch break at the Cazadores Hotel in Nuevo Laredo. He shared of his surprise when, after only a few months of knowing the priest, Father Jesse purchased him a car, then a truck, then a house in Manuel's name. Father Jesse opened a bank account for him, with an initial deposit of 50,000 pesos. Due to Father Jesse's generosity, Manuel left his girlfriend, to live with the priest, and they were now creating a life together. When I asked if Father Jesse was an *enojón* – the angry person we knew him to be at Cristo Rey – Manuel noted how Father Jesse encountered a certain tranquility in Mexico. "He rested here," Manuel said, "I took care of him, and he was often very happy here. He was a very lovely person to me."

Father Mathias also shares of the cognitive dissonance that the jail yard interview created within him. "I'll be honest," he says. "I really don't know what to believe." He continues:

Having confessed to Father Jesse's murder two years earlier, Manuel now asked for my help to get him out of prison. He shared the story of how a cartel had extorted him for money, threatening his life and the lives of his family in Veracruz. On the night of March 30, 2009, he says, some five men tied him up, blindfolded him, and waited for Father Jesse's arrival. They murdered the priest, Manuel said, while he was blindfolded and tied up. At gun point, they made him help with the disposal of the body, then they took him to the bus station, where they bought him a ticket to Chiapas. I'll be honest: The pieces don't fit together for me, nor do they align with any of the stories that Manuel had previously shared during press conferences shortly after his arrest. "I'm paying for a crime that I didn't commit," he now insists.

Father Mathias also asked Manuel about the news reports of him murdering the priest in anger after discovering that the priest was having a relationship with someone else. Manuel replied:

[Father Jesse] did speak of a guy, and I said, “You can bring him to live with us.” I think his name was Armando. He was probably in his 40s. He was in prison in the U.S. and was now his altar server. He talked about how Armando used to steal from the collections at the chapel or cathedral of Cristo Rey. His sisters got angry with him because he bought Armando a car, too, and because he allowed Armando to steal money from the collections.

Father Mathias concludes,

Cada cabeza es un mundo (Each head is its own world). This side of the parousia, I don’t expect that any of us will ever fully understand Father Jesse or the events surrounding his tragic murder. For many years, I believed Father Jesse Euresti to be the only truly evil person I have ever encountered on this earth. With the help of works like *Evil Genes*, though, I’ve come to view him and his words and actions through a lens of compassion. His “leadership” of this parish was a dark time for Cristo Rey—but I imagine it was an even darker time for him personally, which is why he found such “light” in Nuevo Laredo and looked forward to his retirement. *Pobrecito* (poor guy).

Chapter Fourteen

Cristo Rey Catholic Church “*Tu Casa*”: The Pastorate of “Father Obama”

“It was time to reconstruct all that Father Larry
had previously done for this community!”

Father Jayme Mathias

“More than 8,000 people joined us
for our celebrations throughout the weekend.”

El Heraldo de Cristo Rey

“Dearest Father Jayme, our hearts overflow with thanks to you
for the two awesome years you have been at Cristo Rey.”

Sister Mary Gloria Mar, F.M.A.

“Like Father Larry, he was a real shepherd,
a good listener, and a real leader.”

Rita (Navarro) Cuevas

“Father Obama”

Fascinatingly, after the death of Father Jesse Euresti, the community that struggled to make sense of his passing soon began to make see current events through a national analogy. Earlier in 2009, they saw the inauguration of a new U.S. President. The former President, George W. Bush, took the U.S. from a national surplus to crushing debt. He often absented himself from D.C., preferring instead to pass weeks at his ranch and “Western White House” in McLennan County, Texas. He was known for his verbal gaffes. He surrounded himself with questionable characters. He engaged nations in war with invented pretexts. If Father Jesse Euresti was the George W. Bush of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, parishioners imagined, his successor was now...“Father Obama”!

With the news of Father Jesse's death on April 6, 2009, Bishop Gregory Aymond immediately named Father Jayme Mathias as pastor of the community. It now fell to "Father Obama" to end "wars" and build bridges, to bring the parish out of debt, and to bring hope and healing to a grieving community. It fell to him to bring to Cristo Rey "hope you can believe in"! Perhaps like Barack Obama, Father Mathias was a young, charismatic "professor/president" who enjoyed community organizing and implementing sweeping change.

Father Mathias remembers the first symbolic act of his pastorate on Monday, April 6, 2009: As the news trucks gathered for the first rosary after the discovery of the former pastor's body in Mexico, Father Mathias worked with parish leaders Roy Gómez and María Elena (Bazán) Ramírez to remove the metal cage that his predecessor had built around the bronze image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the north side of the church, impeding the image from being cleaned of the many spiderwebs that now surrounded it. Father Mathias recalls:

This was a moment of liberation, and God's admonition to "let my people go" [Ex. 5:1] was first symbolized in our destruction of the cage that Father Jesse had erected around *La Virgen*. This woman and her people would no longer be caged – and it was time to reconstruct all that Father Larry had previously done for this community!

26 Months of Great Activity

The following 26 months of great activity are largely chronicled in four volumes of the parish's new newspaper, *El Herald de Cristo Rey* [The Cristo Rey Herald], which are available at the Austin History Center. The first issue, published with the assistance of Ángela Angulo of *El Mundo Newspaper*, was shared on April 5, 2009.

Father Mathias believed in carefully tracking two key performance indicators for the parish: attendance at Sunday Masses, and income. He recalls that when he returned to Cristo Rey in January 2009, the Sunday Mass attendance had dwindled to some 800 to 1,200 people each Sunday under the leadership of his predecessor. The May 10, 2009 issue of *El Herald de Cristo Rey* notes the increase in Mass-goers during the first month of Father Mathias' leadership. As part of a *Día de la Santa Cruz* (Day of the Holy Cross) activity the previous weekend,

all adults attending Mass were invited to place a silk flower onto a large cross, based on their place of origin. The May 10, 2009 issue reports the following numbers of people at Sunday Masses born in each of the following places:

- 457 Texas or U.S.
- 397 Guanajuato
- 263 San Luis Potosí
- 197 Mexico State
- 94 Michoacán
- 75 Zacatecas
- 15 Jalisco
- 510 Other places in Mexico
- 58 Central America
- 6 South America

There were also 594 children present at Sunday Masses, for a total of 2,660 Mass-attendees that weekend.

By May 17, 2009, Mass attendance climbed to 3,251 people. This time, *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* broke down Mass-goers by Mass:

- 421 6:00 p.m.
- 451 7:00 a.m.
- 339 8:30 a.m.
- 1,385 10:30 a.m.
- 212 12:30 p.m.
- 443 5:30 p.m.

The 551 attendees of the parish's 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. English Masses now comprised 17% of Mass-goers at Cristo Rey. Noting that the church comfortably holds 458 people, Father Mathias proposed an expanded Mass schedule beginning on June 1, 2009, with three additional Spanish Masses.

Issues of *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* note the climbing attendance: to 3,780 by October 2009, then to 4,367 by October 2010, to 4,834 in January 2011.

As a result of such numbers, Cristo Rey celebrated unprecedented numbers of sacraments. At the 2010 Easter Vigil alone, for instance, Cristo Rey celebrated 28 adult Baptisms, 62 First Communions, and 99 Confirmations as part of the parish's Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. This would be surpassed in 2011, when Cristo Rey celebrated 69 First Communions and 120 Confirmations of adults during the Easter Vigil.

Parish income also radically increased. In 2010, for instance, the Finance Council reported that the parish finished the first six months of that year with a profit of \$101,400, an incredible sum for Cristo Rey. During that same year, the parish's Social Ministry generously supported 38 local organizations:

- Cristo Rey bill payment program
- Cristo Rey food pantry
- Angels of Hope food pantry of Catholic Charities
- Baptist Community Center food pantry
- Capital Area Food Bank
- Austin Baptist Chapel soup kitchen
- Food for the Poor
- Haiti earthquake victims
- VIDES+USA
- Mission to Mexico
- Mary House Catholic Worker of Austin
- Coalition for the Homeless
- VinCare/St. Louise House
- Gabriel Project Life Center
- Project Rachel
- John Paul II Life Center
- Our Lady of the Angels Maternity Shelter
- Austin Coalition for Immigrant Rights
- Casa Marianella
- Victory Outreach
- Festival Beach Community Garden
- Any Baby Can
- Burke Foundation for Children
- La FUENTE Learning Center
- *Sí Se Puede* Learning Cent
- Pan-Am Recreation Center summer camps
- San Juan Diego Catholic High School
- St. Mary Cathedral School
- KIPP Austin College Prep
- Eastside Memorial High School
- Brooke Elementary School
- Metz Elementary School
- Zavala Elementary School
- Austin Interfaith
- Austin House of Prayer

The Rebirth of Stewardship

Father Mattingly had previously focused on parish stewardship, a phrase that he translated to Spanish as *compromiso parroquial* (commitment to one's parish). Father Mathias now reinvigorated parish stewardship efforts. In January 2009, as Financial Administrator, he formed a Stewardship Committee, led by Director of Stewardship, Hermilo Jaimes. A 2009 article in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* sheds light on this Committee:

The Cristo Rey Stewardship Committee was born on January 19, 2009, during a meeting of our parish's former *Jamaica* Committee. At that meeting, the members of the *Jamaica* Committee reflected on the fact that much work was necessary in 2008 to host two *jamaicas* which netted \$28,000 for our parish community. At that moment, Associate Pastor Father Jayme Mathias took out a calculator and began crunching the numbers. "If we divide \$28,000 over the 52 weeks of the year," he shared, "all we have to do is to find a way to raise our parish collections \$539 per week, and we've raised the same amount of money!" Suddenly the members of the former *Jamaica* Committee began to think of creative ways to raise parish collections and to generate revenue for our parish community in other ways. By the end of the evening, they determined that the most fiscally-responsible decision was to suspend the *jamaica* for one year, and to pursue other creative means for meeting parish financial obligations. In fact, by the end of the evening, they had proposed rebranding themselves as our parish's present Stewardship Committee.

As a result of that meeting in January, Father Jayme worked to prepare a plan for creating three revenue-generating positions within our parish community. The first position that he proposed to then-pastor Father Jesse Euresti was that of a Director of Stewardship, who would be responsible for helping inspire parishioners to more generously share of their time, talent and treasure. After convening the Stewardship Committee, the idea was raised to invite all parishioners to generously share of their time

and talent during a “Spring Cleaning Day” in which we might work to clean parish lawns and facilities. More than 400 people assisted in cleaning our parish grounds and buildings, thus confirming our decision to hire a parish Director of Stewardship.

Milo Jaimes, Director of Stewardship, shares that the Stewardship Committee presently meets on Wednesday evenings to strategize ways in which our parish community might continue to involve parishioners in our parish life. The birth of our new parish security corps, and the planning of details for such events as our celebration of the “Day of the Holy Cross” and the “*Día de los Albañiles*” resulted from the work of this group.

The Stewardship Committee is presently planning a five-week course on stewardship, which they will initiate on May 13, at 7:00 p.m. All are invited to this course, which will conclude with a special recognition ceremony for all participants on June 13.

As a result of revitalized parish stewardship efforts, more than 560 families made a commitment at the end of 2009 to increase their giving to the parish in 2010. Their names are printed in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey*.

Restoring Property & Facilities

The first issue of *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* spoke of a “Spring Cleaning Day” on March 14, which drew 400+ people to Cristo Rey, to share over 1,800 hours of volunteer time with the church. Frances (Bazán) Martínez of the *Sociedad Guadalupana*, which served lunch to over 400 people, shared, “It was phenomenal. It was absolutely awesome. We were working in harmony, with lots of smiles, and we loved making our parish more beautiful!” The paper relates,

The idea for this Spring Cleaning Day was birthed during the conversation of more than 90 parish leaders at a parish-wide meeting facilitated by Fr. Jayme Mathias on February 17. In determining a set of priorities for our community, these parish leaders suggested that various parish facilities were suffering from neglect, and that such a cleaning event

would help unify our parish community. The organization of the event was led by Director of Stewardship Milo Jaimes and our parish Stewardship Committee.

Father Mathias remembers with fondness,

After Father Jesse named me Financial Administrator of the parish, one of the first things I did was to assemble a Stewardship Committee and to hire, Milo Jaimes, a respected community leader as our parish's new Stewardship Director. He was a master at rallying the time, talent and treasure of parishioners!"

Cristo Rey Staff

Father Mathias set himself to constructing a team of support staff to take Cristo Rey to new heights. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians shared with Cristo Rey Sr. Elizabeth Villanueva, F.M.A., the Director of Religious Education; Sr. María Rodríguez, F.M.A., Director of Faith & Education; and Sr. Guadalupe Medina, F.M.A., Director of Evangelization. In addition to Hermilo "Milo" Jaimes, Director of Stewardship, and Ángeles Godínez, Receptionist, who were hired before Father Mathias' pastorate, the staff now included Michele Rodríguez, Administrator; Benito Guerrero, Jr., Director of Development; and Rubén Bucio and Tito Carrillo, Maintenance.

Not all these staff changes were without controversy. Father Mathias remembers, for instance, the difficult conversation that he had with Gavino Fernández, Jr., who served as the "personal assistant" of Father Jesse until his death on March 31, 2009.

I told Gavino that I wouldn't be needing a "personal assistant" and that I hoped to bring to the most amicable close his tumultuous relationship with Cristo Rey. You can imagine my surprise some months later when the Diocesan Vicar, Monsignor Michael Mulvey, called me with the news that, as a result of my termination of Gavino's employment with the parish, he had invented all sorts of spurious sexual abuse allegations against me. These allegations were duly investigated by the diocese's Office of Ethics and Integrity in Ministry, which found no basis for

a single lie of his, and I lost that day any remaining bit of respect that I had for Gavino. He didn't relent in his vengeance on Cristo Rey during the entire time that I was there, as evidenced by the vacant lot which remains to this day [on the northwest corner of East Second and Robert Martínez] where we were planning to build a new parish office. That barren lot stands as a testament to the evil in his heart.

Under Father Mathias' leadership, the parish staff enjoyed times of retreat at Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center in Temple, with Father Mattingly and the Conventual Franciscan Friars in San Antonio, and at a convent in Saltillo, Coahuila.

Dealing with the Former Pastor's Family

The family of Father Jesse Euresti continued to mourn his tragic murder in ways that often brought negative energy to Cristo Rey. On one Sunday morning, for instance, they organized a protest of some six people in front of the church demanding that a large picture of him be hung in the center of the parish hall stage. Father Mathias remembers, "It was a challenging line to walk: He was certainly no saint and hardly deserving of such an honor, but his family was saying and doing the darnedest things as part of their process of grieving him." On September 13, 2009, the parish celebrated a new "Pastor's Gallery," which contained photos of all of the parish's pastors throughout history – including Father Euresti. Father Jayme shares the story:

Fortunately, Father Jesse's family didn't come to the unveiling of that gallery. When the curtain was pulled back by parishioners, it snagged on "Unlucky 13," Father Jesse's picture, which came crashing to the floor, shattering the glass in his frame. Those present interpreted it as yet another 'divine sign' concerning their former pastor, that his image was just not meant to be hung or honored in that space!"

The same month, in honor of what would have been the former pastor's 70th birthday, the parish's *Grupo de Oración* hosted the Euresti family for a time of prayer and healing.

Associate Pastors

For ten months, Father Mathias was the sole priest at Cristo Rey. He recalls,

After we expanded the Mass schedule on June 1, 2009, to include eight Sunday Masses, I would celebrate the ‘marathon’ of six morning and early-afternoon Masses, then I’d fall into a deep sleep at the rectory for a three-hour nap before finishing the two Sunday evening Masses. You can imagine how happy I was when the Diocese of Austin finally sent help!

Father Facundo Medina Blanco, a young priest from Colombia, arrived at Cristo Rey in January 2010. In addition to assisting with Masses, sacraments and office appointments, Father Facundo penned a weekly reflection on the Sunday scriptures in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey*. Father Mathias remembers, “Father Facundo was young and impressionable – able to be formed. When he arrived, I told him I only had two rules: ‘Never talk down to people,’ – which resulted from the terrible experience people had under my predecessor – and ‘No Mass can last more than 60 minutes.’”

A year later, after Father Facundo was assigned to a new ministry in the Diocese, Father Antonio Germán Pérez Cuentas, the former Chancellor of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cusco, Peru, arrived at Cristo Rey in January 2011. He remained at Cristo Rey for five months, until the arrival of the Conventual Franciscan Friars of Mexico in June 2011.

Deacons

Two deacons served Cristo Rey during Father Mathias’ pastorate: Deacon Nelson “Neil” Fahlund and Deacon Agapito López. Father Mathias remembers that the former was not a good fit for Cristo Rey. “It seems that he had a special relationship with my predecessor, but he spoke no Spanish. There was no way that he could ever minister to more than a sixth of parishioners.” Deacon Agapito López, who was an asset under the leadership of Father Lawrence Mattingly, continue to perform exemplarily in his weekend duties and his ministry to various parish groups. Father Mathias remembers, “We

were baptizing well over 600 infants every year at that time, and Deacon Agapito was responsible for baptizing many of them!"

The Pastoral and Finance Councils

On April 11, 2009, Father Mathias announced that he would reconstitute the parish's Pastoral and Finance Councils. Whereas many parishes elect Pastoral Council members that have little connection to parish life and ministry, Father Mathias announced that the Pastoral Council would be comprised of a representative of each of the eight largest parish ministries. The new Pastoral Council was thus comprised of Miguel & Telly García of the *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano*, Raúl & Marina Hernández of *Cristo Renueva Su Parroquia*, Miguel & Rogelia López of the *Grupo de Oración*, Gilbert & Mary Martínez of the Joy Group, María Elena Ramírez of the *Sociedad Guadalupana*, David & Lily Reyes of Religious Education, Arturo Rodríguez of Parish Stewardship, and Sergio Sánchez of *Adoración Nocturna*.

For the Finance Council, Father Mathias pulled on the gifts of Roy Gómez of Shortstop and Sandy's, Helen Morales of the International Bank of Commerce, Barbara Rivera of the Internal Revenue Service, and Daniel Camarena of *Taquería Arandas*. From outside of Cristo Rey, he pulled on the financial expertise of Ramón Carrasquillo of Carrasquillo Associates, John Chronis of Chronis Interests, LLC, Pedro Kaufmann of Piedras, LLC, Hilbert Maldonado of Hill-Bert's Burgers and John McDaniel of Terry McDaniel & Company. "We certainly learned from our mistakes," Father Mathias says. "Whereas the Finance Council of my predecessor had less depth and few, if any, expectations for its Pastor, we now had serious, dedicated finance people overseeing parish finances!"

Cristo Rey Ministries

El Heraldo de Cristo Rey lists all parish ministries and ministry leaders at the time that Father Mathias assumed leadership of the parish. Listed in alphabetical order in Spanish, they included: *Adoración Nocturna* (Sergio Sánchez), Altar & Rosary Society (Rosa Gil & Nina Requejo), *Católicos Misioneros* (Leticia Salas), Parish Stewardship Committee (Milo Jaimes), *Comunidades de Base* (José Juan Grimaldo), Finance Council, Pastoral Council, *Cristo Renueva Su*

Parroquia (Raúl & Marina Hernández), *Cursillos de Cristiandad* (Adolfo “Doc” Álvarez), Religious Education (Sr. Elizabeth Villanueva, F.M.A.), *Grupo de Oración* (Rubén Bucio), Breakfast Groups (Roy Gómez), *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey* (Ángeles Godínez), Joy Group (Roy Gómez), *Juventud Misionera* (Ángeles Godínez), Knights of Columbus #10659 (Genaro Rodríguez), Lectors (Zita Chávez & Susan Requejo), Men’s Club (Frank Martínez), Social Ministry (Yolanda Velásquez), Music Ministers (Fr. Jayme Mathias), Eucharistic Ministers (Socorro Bernal & Nina Requejo), *Monaguillos* (Luis Valdez), *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* (Miguel & Eleuteria García), Baptism Preparation (Tito Carrillo, Ben & Paula Rangel), Marriage Preparation (Genaro & Filomena Leal), Salesian Cooperators (Benito Guerrero), *Sociedad Guadalupana* (Frances Martínez), and Youth R.O.C. Group (Sr. Guadalupe Medina, F.M.A.). Father Mathias notes, “The fact that so many parish ministries survived the three preceding dark years is a testament to the leaders and members of these ministries. They were all so truly incredible!”

New ministries were added during Father Mathias’ pastorate, including three specialized ministries for Spanish-speaking persons: *Agua Viva* (Bertha “Bety” Olague), *Caminando con Jesús* (Juan Reyes), and *Cristo, Tú y Yo, Juntos Como Hermanos* (Candelario Jaime). Father Mathias confesses, “I’ll be honest: I’m not entirely sure of the mission and ministry of all these groups, but they were bringing people together and they were cultivating lay leaders. I had the same attitude as Father Larry: If you wanted to begin a new ministry here, ¡bienvenidos [welcome]!”

During those years, Cristo Rey boasted a strong soccer organization, with several teams of children, all dressed in Cristo Rey jerseys, practicing and playing with one another under the watchful eye of parish adults at local soccer fields.

In 2009, Milo Jaimes also helped organize various *Clubs de Oriundos*, where persons from the same city, region or state in Mexico could gather with others in support of the parish and its ministries. These included the *Club de Oriundos de Guanajuato* (Sergio Sánchez), the *Club de Oriundos de Palmar Chico* (Antonio Carbajal), and the *Club de Oriundos de San Luis Potosí* (Arturo Rodríguez). In fact, the newly-formed *Club de Oriundos de Guanajuato* won the coveted crown in the Cristo Rey queen contest of 2009!

The Honorable Cuerpo de Seguridad

With an increase in Mass attendees, parking around Cristo Rey was a veritable challenge. Milo Jaimes organized a dedicated corps of uniformed parish volunteers who served during all Sunday Masses as part of the *Honorable Cuerpo de Seguridad*. Father Mathias remembers, "They were absolutely magnanimous, often spending long hours at Cristo Rey, volunteering to get people in and out for Masses. With their support, we were able to 'keep the trains running on time,' with Masses every 60-90 minutes throughout the day." Because volunteers were connected with one another through walkie talkies and used coded language, Father Mathias would grab a walkie talkie each Sunday and cheer them on with his handle, "*El Águila*."

A 2009 article in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* speaks of this ministry:

The Cristo Rey Security Corps is a recently-formed and much-welcomed ministry which arose from years-old needs. Security and adequate space for parking have long been needs of our parish community. The overseeing of such needs is exactly the ministry of the new Cristo Rey Security Corps.

The parish Security Corps is presently comprised of 13 parishioners who are present on parish grounds and in parish facilities during weekend Masses and parish gatherings. They assist with preventing such problems as blocked allies and entrances, cars being blocked by other parked cars, and the subsequent announcements which are often made during Mass as a result of such challenges.

Director of Stewardship Milo Jaimes is known as the *comandante* (commander) of the parish Security Corps. He notes how the members of the Security Corps welcome parishioners from the moment they arrive at the church. Because of their highly-visible security uniforms, he also shares that many people approach them and ask them questions. Milo oversees the training of Security Corps members, which includes a five-week "boot camp" in stewardship, and participation in an Ethics and Integrity in Ministry workshop.

Magdaleno Reyes Méndez sees his work on the Security Corps as a special ministry. “Our ministry is to help the community, and I enjoy seeing people who are very happy. They leave content, because we help them to find parking and we oversee their cars. He says that Security Corps members begin their ministry each day with a prayer. “First, we pray, and we commend our work to the Lord. It’s a beautiful thing to serve the Lord in this way.”

José Guadalupe Ibarra Yáñez agrees. “I enjoy serving the community,” he shares. “By serving at God’s house, I feel that I’m being of service to God and to God’s people.” Though hesitant at first to join this ministry, José sees his participation as a call from God, as expressed through his cousin, Roberto Yáñez, who also serves on the Security Corps. José notes, “You have to be patient and always wear a smile. Some people arrive late for Mass and get upset when there’s no parking. Our ministry is to offer them service.”

Guadalupe Leal Zuñiga, who has served in various liturgical ministries in our parish community, also recently joined the Security Corps. “We bring order to the parish,” he notes. “It’s a change for our parish, but it’s a beautiful change. There’s order. There’s mutual respect. It makes our parish more inviting. He concludes, “It’s a beautiful ministry, and it’s an honor to serve. I feel happy to do what I’m doing, and I hope to continue helping for a long time.”

The Children’s Liturgy of the Word

The Children’s Liturgy of the Word began in 2009 as an age-appropriate learning experience for young children while their parents attended Mass at Cristo Rey. The presider at the Mass invited all children forward for a blessing, before the Liturgy of the Word, and the children returned to the church during the Lamb of God, in order to receive a blessing during Communion. 40 to 60 children often attended the Children’s Liturgy of the Word during a single Mass, which was sometimes held in the Blessed Sacrament chapel, particularly on rainy days, but was more often hosted in the *Escuelita de San Juan Bosco*.

Vianney Venegas shares:

The Children’s Liturgy of the Word was one of the biggest projects for me at Cristo Rey. It allowed me to discover a different side of ministry. Before then, I was involved in youth groups, and I didn’t know what was involved in serving little ones. They were very innocent, and they depended on us to teach them about God and the teachings of the Church. We were forming their little minds, and that really opened my eyes to what it means to serve!

The Oratory of St. John Bosco

At the beginning of 2010, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians—the Salesian Sisters—and their Salesian Cooperators worked to launch a new ministry to neighborhood children. Children from the Cristo Rey neighborhood were drawn to the *Escuelita de San Juan Bosco* for a few hours each weekday afternoon for snacks, games, lessons on faith and spirituality, and assistance with homework.

Cristo Rey “Tu Casa”

In 2009, Father Mathias worked with GSD&M, a local advertising firm that oversaw all national advertising for such companies as Walmart, the Air Force and John Deere, to rebrand Cristo Rey as “Tu Casa.” He remembers, “The idea for this new tagline came from Milo Jaimés, and we quickly rebranded ourselves: Every time we said ‘Cristo Rey,’ those words were always followed by ‘Tu Casa.’” GSD&M created a new logo for the parish, which called to mind the beautiful stained-glass window on church façade, expressing it in red and gold, so that it appeared to be a gold cross, with red flames of fire.

“The Community of Traditions”

To signify the parish’s desire to incorporate the traditions of its people, Cristo Rey soon added to its tagline, “*La Comunidad de las Tradiciones* [the Community of Traditions].” From 2009 to 2011, the pages of *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* overflow with celebrations of traditions: Christmas and Epiphany traditions, Children’s Day on April 30, Day of the Holy Cross and *Día de los Albañiles* (Bricklayers Day) on May 3, *Fiestas Patrias* in September, St. Francis and St. Jude in

October, St. Martin de Porres in November, and, of course, Christ the King of the Universe in November and Our Lady of Guadalupe in December. Various images from Mexico were also brought through Cristo Rey at that time, including the Holy Child Jesus of Health from Morelia, Michoacán, and a traveling image of Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos from Jalisco.

Two of the largest celebrations each year were the parish's honoring of Christ the King in November and of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December. The November 28, 2010 issue of *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* shares several photos and speaks of the parish's celebration of Christ the King of the Universe that year:

On November 20-21, we celebrated the solemnity of our patron, Christ the King. The celebration began on the afternoon of November 20, when we welcomed various members of the worldwide Nocturnal Adoration movement from throughout the U.S. and Mexico.

At 9:50 p.m., after a time of enjoying traditional foods and music, we processed with the image of our patron to the church, where we enjoyed a time of eucharistic adoration. At midnight, we sang *Las Mañanitas* to Christ the King, then celebrated a midnight Mass.

On Sunday morning, we gathered at 5:00 a.m. to again sing *Las Mañanitas* to our patron. In honor of the celebration, Mariachi Cristo Rey provided the rousing music for our first six Sunday liturgies.

This was also a day of homecoming celebrations. During our 8:30 a.m. Mass, we welcomed home our former associate pastor, Charles Campise, who served our parish community from 1967-1969. Father Rito Dávila, who served as associate pastor of our community from 2006-2007, celebrated our 1:00 p.m. Mass. Father Albert Ruiz, who served as associate pastor of our parish from 1973-1975 and as pastor of our parish from 1983-1984, joined us as the principal celebrant of our 5:30 p.m. Mass.

An even larger celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe that year is chronicled with photos in the December 18, 2010 issue of *El Heraldo*

de Cristo Rey speaks of the parish's celebration of Christ the King of the Universe that year:

On December 11, we gathered to celebrate the Queen of Mexico and the Empress of the Americas: Our Lady of Guadalupe!

The evening celebration began after our monthly healing service, with our recitation of the rosary in the parking lot outside the parish center.

Two groups of *matlachines* then led us in procession, as we followed along behind an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Once inside the church, the *matlachines* danced in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, together with a group of local *conchero* dancers.

We then enjoyed an evening of praise with Eleazar and Lety Garza from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon.

At midnight, Eleazar and Lety were joined by our pastor, "El Padre Charro," and all 1,300 people present sang *Las Mañanitas* in honor of Our Lady.

Various choirs and dancers performed in the church throughout the night until 5:00 a.m., when we gathered at our outdoor image of Our Lady of Guadalupe to again sing *Las Mañanitas*.

More than 8,000 people joined us for our celebrations throughout the weekend, offering Our Lady several hundreds of dozens of roses and a small sea of vigil candles. It was indeed a fitting celebration of our Mother!

"The Majesty of Mariachi Masses"

Beginning on June 1, 2009, Cristo Rey hosted a bilingual mariachi, Mariachi Cristo Rey, for four weekly Sunday Masses. Father Mathias shares, "I've always believed that, if you want to draw people to a church, you need good music and good preaching. The idea for a *mariachi* wasn't original—I stole the idea from San Juan del Valle—but it sure was a hit!" He jokes, "It also made our branding a mouthful! We would say, '¡Bienvenidos a [Welcome to] Cristo Rey, Tu Casa, la

Comunidad de las Tradiciones y la Majestuosidad de las Misas con Mariachi!"

Cristo Rey Healing Services

San Juan del Valle came to Austin in more than one way: Not only was Cristo Rey now known for its *mariachi* Masses; beginning in May 2009 it also began hosting a monthly healing service on the second Saturday of each month, which was reminiscent of the monthly healing service in the Río Grande Valley. These services were led by the parish's *Grupo de Oración*. Father Mathias remembers,

There were certainly a lot of people who were 'slain in the Spirit' during those services. Hopefully, even more people experienced some bit of healing as a result of those services. Father Facundo would dismiss those service as *emocionalismo*, but a lot of people enjoyed an extraordinary experience of community prayer!

Christus Rex Awards

Beginning in 2009, Father Mathias created an annual award program to recognize parishioners for their generous sharing of time, talent and treasure with the community. The first *Christus Rex* (Christ the King) Awards were shared on November 1, 2009, the Solemnity of All Saints. *Univisión* anchor Gustavo Monsante served as Master of Ceremonies for the event. The event recognized the following advertisers in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey*:

- Alberto Albertano,
sobandero profesional
- Altar and Rosary Society
- America Hair Salon
- Assumption Cemetery
- Carla Domínguez, of
Cosméticos Zermat
- Celia Muñiz of *Casa Grande Realty*
- Chuy's Body Shop
- C.I.E. Management Services
- *Cristo Renueva Su Parroquia*
- Cristo Rey Youth R.O.C.
- Dr. Belda Zamora & Dr. Guadalupe Zamora, of Zamora Medical Clinic
- Elite Auto Works
- Eusebio Landín of *La Casita Plumbing*
- Gloria Vera, Immigration Attorney
- Hill-bert's Burgers
- Juan in a Million
- *Juventud Misionera*

- *La Feria* Mexican Restaurant
- *La Michoacana Carnicería, Frutería, Taquería y Panadería*
- Law Office of Alberto García
- *Los Dos Laredos*
- *Los Huaraches*
- María Concepción Rojel, OmniLife Distributor
- Matrix Automotive
- *Mofles El Tapatío*
- *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano*
- Olmeca's Mexican Restaurant
- Orlando Monzón
- Pepe's Fruit Cup Shop
- Raymundo and Maricela Rebollar of Marisol's Boutique
- S&T Duran Insurance
- Salesian Cooperators
- San Juan Diego Catholic High School
- *Sonido "Hot Ground"*
- Stadio Motors
- *Taquería Chapala, #1*
- *Taquería y Mariscos Valle de Bravo, #2*
- West Art International

The following *Christus Rex* Awards recognized 71 people who together shared more than 20,000 hours of service to Cristo Rey during 2009 alone and 11 people who together shared over \$45,000 with Cristo Rey during 2009:

- María Acosta
- Antolín Aguirre
- Tomás & Alladira Arteaga
- Adolfo "Doc" Álvarez
- Rigoberto Álvarez Gallegos
- Jesse & Adela Arroyo
- Ezequiel Avendaño
- Sister María Becerril, F.M.A.
- Tomás & Isabel Benítez
- César Camacho
- Lorenzo Cano
- Antonio Carbajal
- Francisco Carbajal
- Ramón & Liby Carrasquillo
- Tito Carrillo
- Albert Cásarez
- Bernadina Castillo
- Deanna Cervántez
- Jaime Contreras
- Raúl Cruz
- Benito Escobedo
- Graciela Escobedo
- Guadalupe Felán
- Guadalupe Flores
- Alberto García
- Lupita García
- Miguel & Telly García
- Yvett García
- Roy Gómez
- Guillermo Granados
- José Juan Grimaldo
- Fausto Hernández
- Raúl & Marina Hernández
- Vanessa Hernández

- Ynosencia Herrera
- José Guadalupe Ibarra Yáñez
- Sixto Jaimes
- Josie Juárez
- Guadalupe Leal
- Johnny “Canica” Limón
- Deacon Agapito López
- Alejandrina López
- Enrique & Bertha López
- Miguel & Rogelia López
- Blanca Méndez
- Miriam Méndez
- Orlando Mondragón
- Helen Morales
- Clementina Morán
- Mary Lou Piña
- Dorothy Portillo
- María Ramírez
- Don & Ruby Ream
- Nina Requejo
- David Reyes
- Juan Reyes
- Lily Reyes
- Magdaleno Reyes
- Pauline Rico
- Raúl Rico
- Joe Robledo
- Arturo Rodríguez
- Albino & Myra Rosales
- David & Gloria Ruedas
- Sergio Sánchez
- Gustavo Torres
- Jeanne Torres
- Juan & Olivia Valdez
- Luis Valdez
- María Elena Vásquez
- Raymond & Mary Vásquez
- Yolanda Velásquez
- Vianney Venegas
- Miguel Verdugo
- Benjamín Villafuerte
- John & Angie Villanueva
- Roberto Yáñez

Christus Rex Lifetime Achievement Awards were also shared with:

- The Inés and Carlota Ramírez Family: Frances Ramírez, Telesfora Ramírez, Eudelia Linsey, Tim Ramirez, María Ramírez, and Alice Ramírez
- Micaela Cantú
- Marcelo and Felice Arocha
- Monsignor Victor Goertz

The second annual *Christus Rex* Awards were celebrated on October 31, 2010. The following ministries were recognized for together raising over \$56,000 for Cristo Rey through their queen candidates:

- *Los Católicos Misioneros*
- *El Club de Oriundos de San Luis Potosí*

- *Cristo Renueva Su Parroquia*
- *El Grupo de Oración "Renovación en el Espíritu Santo"*
- *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey*
- Children's Liturgy of the Word
- Eucharistic Ministers, Proclaimers of the Word & Altar Servers
- Youth R.O.C. (Duchess)
- *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* (Princess)
- *Adoración Nocturna & the Club de Oriundos de Guanajuato* (Queen)

The following *Christus Rex* Awards recognized 70 people who together shared more than 17,000 hours of service to Cristo Rey during 2010 and 18 people who together shared over \$86,000 with Cristo Rey during 2010:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| • Connie Acosta | • Roy Gómez |
| • Adolfo "Doc" Álvarez | • Aguzenia Granados |
| • Julio & Guillermina
Álvarez | • Ramiro & Mary Guzmán |
| • Rigoberto Álvarez Gallegos | • Esther Hernández |
| • Jesse & Adela Arroyo | • Fausto Hernández |
| • Tomás & Alladira Arteaga | • Rebecca Hernández |
| • Joe & Pauline Ávila | • Vanessa Hernández |
| • Eliazar Barrientos | • Candelario Jaime |
| • Sister María Becerril,
F.M.A. | • Sixto Jaimes |
| • Guadalupe Benítez García | • Josie Juárez |
| • Antonio Carbajal | • Eusebio Landín |
| • Ramón & Liby Carrasquillo | • Guadalupe Leal |
| • Albert Cásarez | • Johnny "Canica" Limón |
| • David Cavazos | • Deacon Agapito &
Alejandrina López |
| • Raúl Cruz | • Enrique & Bertha López |
| • Jorge & Martha Enríquez | • Miguel & Rogelia López |
| • Guadalupe Felán | • Molly Mar |
| • Freddie & Linda Finch | • Flor Martínez |
| • Guadalupe Flores | • Frank & Frances Martínez |
| • Alberto & Blanca García | • Javier & Mireya Mayén |
| • Miguel & Telly García | • Abraham & Blanca Méndez |
| • María Giles | • Helen Morales |

- Clementina Morán
- Irma Muñoz
- Mary Lou Piña
- Elise Plaisance
- Dorothy Portillo
- María Ramírez
- María Elena Ramírez
- Ben & Paula Rangel
- Nina Requejo
- David Reyes
- Juan Reyes
- Lily Reyes
- Magdaleno Reyes
- Pauline Rico
- Raúl Rico
- Barbara Rivera
- Joe Robledo
- Arturo Rodríguez
- Genaro Rodríguez
- Miguel Rojas
- David & Gloria Ruedas
- Guadalupe & María Leticia Salas
- Erik Salazar
- Margarita Salazar
- René Salazar
- María Luce Salinas
- Gerardo Santamaría
- Gustavo Torres
- Juan & Olivia Valdez
- Luis & Luisa Valdez
- María Elena Vásquez
- Richard & Isabel Velásquez
- Tonie Velásquez
- Vianney C. Venegas
- VIDES+USA
- Benjamín Villafuerte
- Roberto Yáñez

Christus Rex Lifetime Achievement Awards were also shared with:

- Basilio y Cruz Gómez
- Vidal Limón
- Amelia Pérez
- Frank Ramírez
- Jacinto y Juanita Sánchez

New Saints at Cristo Rey

With the remodeling of the parish chapel in 2010, Father Mathias imagined a place where the people of Cristo Rey could be at home with their special saints. He developed a parish survey, so that people could list their favorite saints. As a result, the parish brought from Mexico news images of the following saints for the Blessed Sacrament chapel: Christ the King of the Universe, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mary Help of Christians, St. Jude, The Holy Child of Atocha, Our Lady of San Juan, St. Joseph, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Pascual Baylon, St. Martin de Porres, St. Toribio Romo and

St. Juan Diego. The January 30, 2011 issue of *El Herald de Cristo Rey* lists all “*padrinos*” (donors) for these many images during the previous year.

An Unforgettable Pilgrimage to Cristo Rey

Many parishioners remember with fondness the church’s 2010 spring break pilgrimage to the 75-foot image of Christ the King atop Mount Cubilete, outside Silao, Guanajuato. “It was a quick trip,” Father Mathias remembers, “and it was a journey of faith. With cartel violence on the rise in Mexico at the time, I prayed for our safety all the way there and all the way back!” Parish photographer Alberto García accompanied the group and captured several memories of the pilgrimage.

VIDES+USA Missioners at Cristo Rey

In the fall of 2009, Father Mathias invited Sister Mary Gloria Mar, F.M.A. to establish at Cristo Rey the national office for VIDES (Volunteers In Development, Education, & Solidarity), a volunteer missionary organization that regularly sent lay missionaries to Salesian missions throughout the world. During the next two years, Sister Mary Gloria formed and sent out dozens of lay missionaries with the assistance of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesian Cooperators, and Mary Lou (Figueroa) Piña, who often opened up her home so that VIDES missioners could sleep in her spare bedrooms and all over her living room. The VIDES Missioners often practiced their developing skills with the children of the Oratory of St. John Bosco, the Children’s Liturgy of the Word, and through summer and winter camps that they hosted for children in the *Escuelita de San Juan Bosco*.

By 2011, Cristo Rey sent its first lay missionary, Lorenza Cano, to serve as a missionary in Kenya. Previously active in *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey* and *Juventud Misionera*, Lorenza often wrote with updates that were published in *El Herald de Cristo Rey*.

Sí Se Puede Learning Center

After Father Jesse Euresti chased La FUENTE Learning Center from Cristo Rey in 2006, the *Escuelita de San Juan Bosco* largely sat

empty for three years. With the assistance of Christina Collazo, the former Director of the Corporate Work Study Program at San Juan Diego Catholic College Preparatory School, Father Mathias now replaced La FUENTE with a new 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, *Sí Se Puede* Learning Center. Beginning in September 2009, Christina re-created many of the programs that were previously suppressed by Father Euresti, making the learning center most known for its program of educating pre-school children together with their parents. In this way, parents were equipped with new knowledge and parenting skills that could help them to better advocate for their children. Christina was greatly assisted by Lupita and Yvett García and a host of volunteers who assisted with various programs and details.

Cristo Rey Institute of Spirituality, Theology and Institutional Leadership

In May 2010, Father Mathias brought to birth a parish theological institute named CRISTO, the Cristo Rey Institute of Spirituality, Theology and Institutional Leadership. During the next 12 months, the institute hosted a number of adult education opportunities on such topics as "Intimacy & Interiority," "Psychology, Psychotherapy & Psychiatry," "Hebrew Scriptures," "Wisdom Writings," "The Christology of the Early Church," "Catholic Ethics & Morality," "An Introduction to Liturgy: The Parts & Postures of Mass," "The Liturgical Year," "The 15 Criteria of a Mature Personality," "Understanding Others," "Understanding the Differences between Americans and Mexicans," "Leaders and Influence," and "Power and Relationships." The last two courses helped parishioners to understand power dynamics as they prepared to go before city officials for the necessary rezoning to allow them to build a new parish office building on the northwest corner of East Second and Robert Martínez, Jr. Streets, which had always been zoned residential.

Perhaps the two most interesting offerings at CRISTO were a course in dining etiquette hosted at the Headliners Club in downtown Austin, which prepared parish leaders for their presence that year at the Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce banquet, and a six-week course, "World Religions," which included visits to Barsana Dham Hindu Temple, the Islamic Center of Greater Austin, the

Austin Shambhala Buddhist Meditation Center, a Jewish seder meal hosted in the parish hall by Benihana owner Brad Meltzer, an introduction to non-Catholic Christian churches at the First Mexican Baptist Church, and an introduction to the indigenous beliefs of Mexico.

Plans Scuttled for New Parish Office

In the summer of 2010, plans were announced for a new parish office, to alleviate the challenges of the double-wide trailer brought on site by Father Euresti and Gavino Fernández, Jr. 166 letters of support were gathered from neighbors living within 500 feet of the site. The names of nearly 2,550 supporters of this project were published in the September 5, 2010 issue of *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey*. By the time of the first public meeting on the issue at the Pan-Am Recreation Center on September 1, 2010, only a single letter of opposition had been received, from Gavino Fernández, Jr., who continued to rally opposition from *Barrio Unido*. When the case came before the City's Planning Commission, Cristo Rey parishioners dressed in florescent green T-shirts that contained three large symbols: "I," a large red heart, and the brightly-colored stained-glass window of Cristo Rey. This was toward the end of Father Mathias' leadership at Cristo Rey; his successor likely abandoned this project upon seeing a decrease in the necessary mass attendance and collections that would make such a dream a reality.

Public Differences with the New Bishop of Austin

With archconservative Pope Benedict XVI's naming on January 31, 2010 of Joe S. Vásquez to lead the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin, progressive priests like Father Mathias would be set on a collision course with the increasingly right-leaning Church.

On April 9, 2011, Cristo Rey, which was now Austin's largest Spanish-speaking congregation, was scheduled to host a Hispanic, Roman Catholic U.S. Congressman, Luis Gutiérrez, to speak on comprehensive immigration reform. As related in the Editor's Note of this work, Father Jayme shares:

Three days before the planned event, I received a call from the Vicar of the Diocese, Monsignor Michael Sis, who

kindly asked that I disinvite Congressman Gutiérrez. I pressed to know the reason. Not forthcoming, he insisted, "Your bishop has asked you to disinvite the Congressman, and I am simply being obedient to your bishop." The reason was obvious: This Hispanic, Roman Catholic U.S. Congressman, by far the greatest champion for immigrant rights at the national level, had voted in favor of his conscience on such issues as women's reproductive health – the health of our sisters, daughters and mothers! – rather than with the merciless, oppressive positions of his right-leaning, patriarchal (and some would suggest, misogynist) church. To cite the phrase of Tom Peters, I also experienced my own BFO that day, my own "Blinding Flash of the Obvious": I was no longer able, in good conscience, to be obedient to Monsignor Sis' bishop. (Imagine the rich irony felt by the people of East Austin when Monsignor Sis' bishop was later named Chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration!)

That weekend, Father Mathias shared the following words in his weekly "From the Pastor" article:

"To be pro-immigrant is to be pro-life." That's the lesson we've all been learning as we've read together the entire pastoral letter of our U.S. and Mexican bishops, "No Longer Strangers," reprinted in this newspaper during seven weeks....

As this newspaper goes to print, it remains unclear whether U.S. Congressman Luis Gutiérrez will be allowed to speak here at our parish community. The opposition is certainly strong. And many of the arguments against his presence are admittedly weak ("It will conflict with your Mass schedule!" and "You don't have enough parking to host him!").

Congressman Gutiérrez went to jail for the immigrant community. He stands up for what he believes in, and, like Jesus of Nazareth, he has been persecuted for his beliefs and actions. Rather than hurling the first stone, I invite you

to join me in reaching out and inviting into conversation all who are a voice for the voiceless. Perhaps, even, there is something we might learn from them.

Yes, there are many “pro-life” champions among us. They come in many shapes and sizes. May our pre-conceived notions and prejudices not prevent us from recognizing them,

Within two months, Father Mathias was gone from Cristo Rey. He celebrated his last Masses at Cristo Rey on May 27, 2011, announcing to the congregation that he would be enjoying a “sabbatical” to complete his doctorate and to focus on other projects.

The Legacy of Father Jayme Mathias

Father Mathias’ pastorate is largely remembered as a time of great stewardship – of great sharing of time, talent and treasure – by Cristo Rey parishioners. In 2009, he regularly bragged on the service and generosity of individual parishioners during regular columns, “Models of Service” and “Models of Generosity” in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* (see Appendix B). As a result, many volunteer projects were easily completed, including the cleaning and power washing of the church, the painting of the parish center and the *Escuelita de San Juan Bosco*, the remodeling of the sanctuary, chapel and gift shop, and the renovation of 2017 East Second Street for a youth ministry house. New Stations of the Cross were purchased for the church, a new altar was constructed, new candlestands were brought from Mexico, and several new statues of saints were purchased.

Father Mathias was known for motivating lay leaders with such oft-repeated phrase as, “*¡Usted es un/a SANTO/A!* [You are a SAINT!]”, “*¡Ustedes son SANTOS!* [Y’all are SAINTS!]” and “*¡Ustedes están ganando las alas!* [Y’all are earning your wings!]”

An October 2010 article in *El Mundo Newspaper* referred to him as “the priest who changed the spiritual life of East Austin.” At Cristo Rey, he was known by a variety of nicknames, including “Father Show-and-Tell” and “the Magician Priest” for his preaching skills, “*el Padre charro*” for his dressing and singing in a black *traje de charro* with a large, black *sombrero*, and “*el Padre chido*” (the cool priest) and “*el Padre más padre*” (the coolest priest). The staff of *El Mundo Newspaper*

also referred to him as “*el Padre revolucionario*” (the revolutionary priest).

Socorro (García) Bernal glows in her recognition of the pastor. She shares, “We [the Spanish-speaking community] have a home, a voice. We have a face. We are recognized – even if we are illegal. After three years of suffering, it delights me to see that we have a home and a face!”

In the May 29, 2011 edition of *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey*, the members of Mariachi Cristo Rey wrote,

You arrived at Cristo Rey at a moment in which our parish most needed a leader like you. With your knowledge and enthusiasm, but most of all your dynamism, Cristo Rey quickly began down the right path....We remain with the memory of your preaching and teaching: short, clear, direct and effective homilies. That and your smile remains with us.

Sister Mary Gloria Mar, F.M.A., wrote:

Dearest Father Jayme, our hearts overflow with thanks to you for the two awesome years you have been at Cristo Rey. Your love, generosity and support have been outstanding. You have really made us feel at home here at Cristo Rey “Tu Casa.” We appreciate the great love and generosity with which you have extended such hospitality. You have opened your heart to us and strengthened us in body and spirit by your enthusiasm and support.

Vianney C. Venegas similarly shared:

In such a small space, it’s difficult to express the enormous gratitude and admiration that I have for your enthusiasm and dedication to our parish community. For 26 months, you have given yourself to the task of knowing us and our lives, needs and concerns. You also formed a community of leaders and “saints.” You have planted many seeds here that will continue to blossom in our parish community. It will be up to us to cultivate these seeds and to continue showing that Cristo Rey truly is “Tu Casa”!

Ten years later, Rita (Navarro) Cuevas remembers:

Father Jayme was a God-send. It was a pleasure to go to Mass with him. He inspired people with his homilies. He spoke clearly and simply. He was delightful, funny and light-hearted; even a third-grader could understand him. Like Father Larry, he was a real shepherd, a good listener, and a real leader.

Chapter Fifteen

The Great Lacuna in the History of Cristo Rey Catholic Church: The Conventual Franciscan Friars of Mexico 2011-2022

“We felt marginalized and pushed out...
The door was shut on our nose.”

Louis Cuevas

“At some point we said,
‘Maybe this isn’t the right place for us.’”

Rita (Navarro) Cuevas

“The fellowship, love and compassion
that people had weren’t there anymore.
Instead, there was a lot of friction, resentment and hate.”

Leonard Gonzales

“I haven’t gone back.”

Marcos Chapa

A Downward Spiral

An entire case study could be written of the years following Father Mathias’ leadership of Cristo Rey. After his departure on May 31, 2011, the Conventual Franciscan Friars of Mexico were assigned to tend to the spiritual needs of Cristo Rey. Because of their inability to speak English and tend to the spiritual needs of the English-speaking congregants who financially supported the parish, Cristo Rey entered a certain “death spiral”: from decreasing attendance (particularly at its English Masses), to decreasing revenues, to the cut of various parish programs and projects.

With decreased parish revenue, the parish’s bilingual newspaper, *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey*, was no longer sustainable. Nine months later,

Mariachi Cristo Rey, whose spirited music literally attracted thousands to Cristo Rey, was cut from the parish budget. In many ways, it was a dark period in the parish's history not too dissimilar from the leadership of Father Euresti.

Louis Cuevas remembers,

It was really hard to understand what they were trying to say in English, and it hard to stay focused on what they were trying to say. They focused their ministry on the immigrant community, so we felt marginalized and pushed out. Since then, I've only gone back to Cristo Rey for a few funerals. It was like the door was shut on our nose. I've gone back for breakfast a time or two, to see people I grew up with, but it just didn't seem as friendly there.

Louis' wife, Rita (Navarro) Cuevas similarly shares:

I'm sure they were good people, but they couldn't speak English and they had no knowledge of our community. Louis and I would look at one another and say, "I don't understand what he just said." At some point we said, "Maybe this isn't the right place for us."

Leonard Gonzales similarly states:

We didn't understand the sermons, and it just didn't feel the same anymore. The fellowship, love and compassion that people had weren't there anymore. Instead, there was a lot of friction, resentment and hate.

Marcos Chapa says:

The English-speaking community felt pushed aside and abandoned. Many left the church, and even [my wife] Christina and I faded away from the church. I haven't gone back since the pandemic, and my mother hasn't gone to Cristo Rey in five or six years.

Marcos mother, Dolores "Dottie" Chapa shares a triggering event for her exodus from Cristo Rey, resulting from an encounter with Father Mario Castro Martínez:

One [Sunday] morning, the priest walked in and said, “*En esta misa, todos van a usar camisa blanca y pantalones negros.* [In this Mass, everyone will dress in a white shirt and black pants].” I looked around: No one was saying anything. I said, “*Padre, las mujeres no usan camiseta* [Father, women don’t wear T-shirts]. *Las mujeres usan blusas* [Women wear blouses].” And he said, “*Ay, ¡que gente tan burra!* [Oh, what stupid people!]” I look at him, and I said, “*Con permiso, pero aquí el burro es usted*” [With all due respect, the stupid one here is you].” I walked out, I sat down and listened to the Mass, and I never went back.

A New Era of Conservatism

For many parishioners, 2011 signaled the beginning of a sort of regression for Cristo Rey and its progressive stances. Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse recalls,

Before Father Larry left, he had formed a group of Third Order Franciscans, to which I belonged, so I can appreciate the conservatism of Franciscans in their natural state. I tend to think of Franciscans as very formal, very conservative, and, I hope, very prayerful. Father Mario was less than what I expected from a Franciscan priest. He didn’t reach out to people, and he hardly responded when I reached out to him. Maybe I was “blacklisted.”

Persecution of Holy Family Catholic Church

Nine months after leaving Cristo Rey, Father Mathias announced that he would birth an inclusive Catholic community in Austin, which would, in many ways, continue the Cristo Rey legacy. While this “unnecessary schism” is the theme of the next chapter, the new community’s impact on Cristo Rey was significant. Perhaps most notably, the Conventual Franciscan Friars reacted with righteous judgment against the new community, often painting it in the darkest terms in their homilies and announcements. They attempted to erase from the parish the memory of the “excommunicated” Father Mathias, and they warned people that their eternal salvation hung in

the balance should they choose to be part of such a welcoming community.

Rita (Navarro) Cuevas shares:

I don't want to speak ill of anyone, but much of what they said against Father Jayme was so unnecessary. It was so disappointing. They fueled a fire of people believing that Holy Family isn't a real church. They established a norm: "The Roman Catholic Church is the only way to go, and, if you go to that church, you're going to hell!" It's obviously against the best interest of the Roman Catholic Church to state the truth—but I just thought that was wrong, and I could not believe it.

René Salazar shares of his disenchantment with the Church, which led from him being an extremely dedicated volunteer, to leaving the Church altogether:

Father Jayme's "excommunication" didn't sit well with me. He was building La FUENTE and using community skills. When people who were guided by him turned to prosecute him, it didn't seem that they were practicing what they were taught. I call it the Great Split: There were those who blindly followed Catholicism, versus those who said, "This guy helped us a lot." I was disillusioned by the Church, and, as a result, I don't go to church at all any more.

The Legacy of the Conventual Franciscans of Mexico

The Conventual Franciscan Friars refused all invitations to be part of this project, so their contribution to Cristo Rey remains unclear to the present author, who is unable to reconstruct the history of the parish during that period with so few resources available online.

Chapter Sixteen

Cristo Rey Births a New Community: The “Unnecessary Schism” of Holy Family Catholic Church

“It was as if some secret had been kept hidden from me.... They were now part of this Catholic-but-not-Roman-Catholic organization, and I said to myself, ‘I have to check this out!’”
Father Jayme Mathias

“Father Jayme was treated so horribly, with such unnecessary defamation of character.... That was the ‘last straw.’ After that, it was a no-brainer to go to Holy Family.”
Rita (Navarro) Cuevas

“So many events happened over the years at Cristo Rey that shook faith in the Roman Church to its core.”
Father Jayme Mathias

“The Holy Spirit arrived, and you know the rest of the story!”
Rev. Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse

Discovering a New Way of Being Catholic

While Father Mathias was on sabbatical in February 2012, former Cristo Rey photographer Alberto García, who had taken well over 120,000 photographs for *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey*, invited Father Mathias to breakfast. Alberto had been speaking with his wife, Blanca, about the need to bring to Austin a more inclusive expression of Catholicism. Father Mathias picks up the story:

Alberto said, “Blanca and I believe that you need to bring the American Catholic Church to Austin.” I said, “The

what?” Alberto took out his iPad, pulled up the website for an Independent Catholic jurisdiction called the ACCUS, the American Catholic Church in the United States. Needless to say, in ten years of seminary studies and ten years as a priest, I had never heard of Independent Catholicism. I was intrigued. It was as if some secret had been kept hidden from me. As Alberto scrolled through the website, I saw the photos of three Conventual Franciscan Friars—Father Jason Lody, Father Christopher Bisett and Father Michael Zocholl—whom I had known during my seminary studies. They were now part of this Catholic-but-not-Roman-Catholic organization, and I said to myself, “I have to check this out!”

Father Mathias enjoyed a 45-minute conversation with the jurisdiction’s then-archbishop, Lawrence J. Harms, who concluded, based on his observation of Father Mathias’ inclusive spirit, that Father Mathias was “more American Catholic than Roman Catholic.” Father Mathias shares, “It was at that moment that I knew that my ministry to the Catholic Church was not over—even if I could no longer serve in good conscience the Roman papacracy.”

Father Mathias called a core group of friends and lay leaders from Cristo Rey to privately let them know of his decision to incardinate into the ACCUS. Once made public, the announcement would not be without controversy and could even result in banter of such matters as “excommunication.”

On Sunday, March 11, 2012, the eleventh anniversary of his first Mass as a Catholic priest, Father Mathias celebrated his first two Masses as a Catholic-but-not-Roman-Catholic priest at his home at 1614 Willow Street. He tells the story:

Ten people attended our first English Mass, and nine people attended our Spanish Mass. From the very start, Roy Gómez was a trusted ally, and Mary Lou Piña was preparing tacos and serving breakfast in my kitchen. And it was as if God’s providential hand was blessing our endeavors: Mariachi Cristo Rey played its last Masses at Cristo Rey on March 4, so they enjoyed a seamless transition to our first *mariachi* Mass in my home!

Word spread of the new, nameless community. Bishop Joe S. Vásquez issued his only statement on the community to the present day. In the letter, which he insisted be read from the pulpit of every Roman Catholic parish in Austin, Bishop Vásquez shared a message intended to scare laity. Father Mathias explains:

The bishop, for whom I have no respect, dared to suggest that “[my] sacraments might be gravely illicit or invalid.” Any uneducated lay person hearing such words automatically thought, “Father Jayme is excommunicated, and his sacraments aren’t valid!” That’s not at all what the letter says. Any seminarian with even a half-semester of studies in sacramental theology knows that my sacraments are 100% valid. To question the validity of my sacraments would be to question the validity of the consecration of Roman Catholic Archbishop of New Orleans Gregory M. Aymond, who ordained me as a priest. Bishop Vásquez wouldn’t dare tread there, so he crafted the most disingenuous language to mislead God’s people: that my sacraments *might be* “gravely illicit” – which I won’t argue – or invalid – which not even he will argue.

Within four weeks, Father Mathias received a letter of eviction from the home he rented on Willow Street. He tells the story:

Lois Villaseñor, the owner of Mission Funeral Home, had promised me some six years before that I could live in the home as long as I lived in Austin, so we invested a lot of time and resources in the renovation of that house. With her health now in decline, her son, Charles, penned the letter of eviction. We’ll never know the truth. Rumor has it that Gavino Fernández, Jr. and/or Frances Martínez threatened a public protest against his funeral home if he didn’t evict me. Regardless, I’ll always be grateful to Lois for her generous spirit and tremendous hospitality.

Holy Family soon made its home at a dance hall, *Los Dos Laredos*, which was owned by Cristo Rey parishioner Ignacio Loredó. The hall provided space for the community to grow. By October 2012, for instance, Holy Family hosted a celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation attended by over 800 people. Father Mathias shares,

That distance from Cristo Rey was a great thing. Though I would continue to live in the Cristo Rey neighborhood for another ten years, the physical distance between Cristo Rey and Holy Family resulted in the Conventual Franciscans there not feeling that they had to talk about us every weekend.

Free from the structures and strictures of the Roman Church, Holy Family continued to grow and flourish, continuing to en flesh the legacy of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in East Austin. On July 1, 2022, Holy Family began its present lease of Salem Lutheran Church, a cozy, white-stone church on the heavily-trafficked Farm-to-Market Road 812, which leads to the Circuit of the Americas.

The Holy Family Spirit

Many people who previously felt at home at Cristo Rey Catholic Church now find “fresh air” at Holy Family Catholic Church. Louis Cuevas explains, “No one is excluded, no one has their ‘nose in the air,’ and we can understand the sermons.” Many of Louis’ family members – including his mother and sisters and their families – soon found themselves attracted to Holy Family as well. “We had no issue in coming to Holy Family,” he says. “We knew in our hearts that what we were doing was right.”

Louis’ wife, Rita (Navarro) Cuevas, adds:

We questioned where we belonged. Louis and I weren’t married by the Catholic Church, and there were things about the Roman Church that didn’t fit us. It hurt us a lot to hear for so many years that we couldn’t receive Communion, and the way that Father Jayme was treated so horribly, with such unnecessary defamation of character by what is supposedly a generous, kind and loving church. That was the “last straw.” After that, it was a no-brainer to go to Holy Family.

Rita is credited with proposing in 2012 the name for the nascent community: Holy Family.

An Unnecessary Schism

Father Mathias reflects on the fact that Holy Family Catholic Church was, in many ways, unnecessary. He shares: “Had the Roman Catholic Church treated its clergy and people better over time, there would have been no need for a community like Holy Family. Instead, so many events happened over the years at Cristo Rey that shook faith in the Roman Church to its core.” He notes how poor treatment of the parishioners through the years by their clergy and their church led many to seek other non-Roman ways of living and expressing their Catholic faith.

Deacon Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse, the first woman to be ordained to ministry at Holy Family in accord with scriptures (Rom. 16:1) and the history of the ancient Church, summarizes:

Our bishop showed himself to be very uncaring, very cold and very non-responsive to the needs of our community. Father Jesse was less than humane with the community – definitely not a good shepherd. The pain that was felt by so many of us was so traumatic, and it spilled over onto the Roman Catholic Church. We came to see that God had to be a lot bigger than the Roman Catholic Church. Many of us decided to go in a different direction. After Holy Family had started, Roy [Gómez] called me and asked, “Are you still going to Cristo Rey.” I said, “I still go to the church to pray when they don’t have services, but I don’t go to Mass anymore.” He said, “We’ll be celebrating Mass in Father Jayme’s living room, if you want to join us” – and I thought, “How much more grassroots can it get?” That was Father Jayme’s second weekend of Masses, and I remember thinking, “Wow, this must be similar to what happened when Christ got his people together!” The Holy Spirit arrived, and you know the rest of the story!

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Appendix A

Pastors, Associate Pastors, Deacons, Religious Brothers and Religious Sisters at Cristo Rey Catholic Church

Pastors of Cristo Rey Catholic Church

Rev. George John Green, O.M.I.

1950-1951

Reverend Jerome "Jerry" Artola Olaizola, O.M.I.

1951-1953

Reverend William "Bill" O'Connor, O.M.I.

1953-1955

Reverend William Nash, O.M.I.

1955

Reverend (Monsignor) Victor Goertz

1955-1971

Reverend Dan Villanueva

1971-1974

Reverend John Driscoll

1975-1979

Reverend Monsignor Longinus Juventius "Lonnie" Reyes

1979-1983

Reverend Albert Ruiz

1983-1984

Reverend Kirby D. Garner

1984-1991

Reverend Michael Laltrella, O.F.M.Conv.
1991-1994

Reverend Lawrence “Larry” Mattingly, O.F.M.Conv.
1995-2006

Reverend Jesse Evans Euresti
2006-2009

Reverend Jayme Mathias
2009-2011

Reverend Mario Castro Martínez
2011-unknown

Reverend Marcelino Peña Tadeo, O.F.M.Conv.
unknown-2022

Reverend Guillermo Aguilar Alamilla, O.F.M.Conv.
2022-

Associate Pastors and Other Priests at Cristo Rey Catholic Church

Reverend Frank Briganti – 1956-1964

Reverend Everett Trebtoske – 1964-1967

Reverend Edward Dokupil – 1964-1967

Reverend Charles Campise – 1967-1969

Reverend Charles Davis – 1967-1970

Reverend Dan Villanueva – 1967, 1969-1971

Reverend Louis Pavlicek – 1971-1975

Reverend Albert Ruiz – 1974-1975

Reverend Xavier S. Guttenberger (weekend assistance) – 1974-1976

Reverend Albert Cerezo, MRY – 1976-1977

Reverend Steve Montenegro (in residence) – 1976-1977

Reverend Leon Strieder – 1977-78

Reverend John Alan McCaffrey – 1979-982

Reverend Leopoldo Reyes – 1979-1981

Reverend Florencio Rodríguez, T.O.R. – 1981
 Reverend Howard Heathcote – 1982
 Reverend Louis Pavlicek – 1983
 Reverend Fred Chalupa (in residence) – 1983-1984
 An unidentified Jesuit priest (in residence) – 1984
 Reverend Kirby D. Garner – 1984
 Reverend Irudayam – 1985-1986
 Reverend Daniel A. Helminiak (in residence) – 1986-1987
 Reverend Michael Sis – 1987-1988
 Reverend John Boiko – 1989
 Reverend James R. O’Connor – 1990
 Reverend Danny García – 1990-1991
 Reverend Francisco de Guadalupe Gómez – 1991-1994
 Reverend Maurice Hayes, O.F.M.Conv. (in residence) – c. 1992
 Reverend John Elmer, O.F.M.Conv. – 1995-1996
 Reverend Anders “Andrew” Jensen, O.F.M.Conv. – 1998
 Reverend Jayme Mathias – 2001-2006, 2009
 Reverend Vincent Petersen, O.F.M.Conv. (in residence) – 2003-2004
 Reverend Rito Davila – 2006
 Reverend Facundo Medina Blanco – 2010-2011
 Reverend Antonio Germán Pérez Cuentas – 2011
 Reverend Guillermo Aguilar Alamilla, O.F.M.Conv.
 Reverend Enrique Hernández Montoya, O.F.M.Conv.
 Reverend John Calgaro, O.F.M.Conv.
 Reverend Calogero Drago, O.F.M.Conv.

Deacons at Cristo Rey Catholic Church

Deacon Florencio Rodríguez, T.O.R. – 1981
 Deacon Chester Alcalá – 1989-1992
 Deacon Guadalupe Medrano
 Deacon Johnny Ojeda – 1996
 Deacon José Chávez – 1998, 2000
 Deacon Juan López

Deacon Anders “Andrew” Jensen, O.F.M.Conv. – 1997-1998

Deacon Jayme Mathias, O.F.M.Conv. – 2000-2001

Deacon Juan López – 2000-2002

Deacon Neil Fahlund – 2006-2009

Deacon Agapito López

Religious Brothers at Cristo Rey Catholic Church

Brother Robert Henry, C.S.C. (choir director)

Brother Kerry Guillory, O.F.M.Conv. – 1991-2000

Brother James Josh DuPlissey, O.F.M.Conv. (in residence) c. 1993

Brother Jayme Mathias, O.F.M.Conv. – 1995-1996

Brother John Maurer, O.F.M.Conv. (in residence) – 2001-2002

Religious Sisters at Cristo Rey Catholic Church

Catechist Sisters of St. John Bosco

Sister Joseph (née. Victoria) Moreno, SJB

Mother Augusta __

Sister Mary Margaret Hernández

Sister Mary Theresa Castellón

Sister John __

Sister Theresa __

Sister Delia Hernandez (1967-)

Sister Joan __

Sister Martin __

Sister Theresa Murillo, F.M.A.

Sister Socorro Ortega, F.M.A.

Sister Rosalba García, F.M.A.

Sister Irene Tapia, F.M.A.

Sister Trini Reyes, F.M.A.

Sister Jane Sánchez, F.M.A.

Sister Jane Jasso, F.M.A.

Sister Angelita Guzmán, F.M.A.

Sister M. Guadalupe Medina, F.M.A.

Sister Sylvia Castillo, F.M.A.

Sister Emma Stefanoni, F.M.A.

Sister Rose Zanella, F.M.A.

Sister Martina Ponce, F.M.A.

Sister Dolores __, F.M.A.

Sister María Becerril, F.M.A.

Sister Elizabeth Villanueva, F.M.A. — 2008-2011

Sister María Rodríguez, F.M.A. — 2009-2010

Sister Angelina “Angel” Gómez, F.M.A. (in residence) — 2009-2010

Sister Mary Gloria Mar, F.M.A. (in residence) — 2009-2011

Sister Mary Link, F.M.A.

Sister Emma Stefanoni, F.M.A.

Sister Irene Tapia, F.M.A.

Appendix B

“Models of Service” and “Models of Generosity”

2009

The following pieces were printed in *El Heraldo de Cristo Rey* in 2009 and provide some insight into the lives and ministries of certain Cristo Rey parishioners who were singled out and lifted up as models of service and/or of generosity within the Cristo Rey community at that time.

Antolín Aguirre

Antolín Aguirre has been very active in our parish community since 1997. A native of Río Bravo, Tamaulipas, and raised in Los Ramones, Nuevo León, Antolín is married to his wife, Mayita, and together they have five children. As a young man, Antolín was active in his parish in Mexico, and attended his parish youth group, as well as the three-day *Jornada* retreat movement.

When he moved to North Carolina in 1988, Antolín recognized a great need for Spanish-speaking ministry. “There was nothing in Spanish,” he recalls. “There were no Masses, no youth groups. We didn’t have an identity.” Seeing the hunger of the people of North Carolina for Spanish-speaking ministry, Antolín worked with a friend from Cuernavaca, Morelos to create a group called *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo* [Youth United for Christ].

When Antolín came to Austin, he searched for a youth group similar to the traditional youth groups of Mexico. He spoke with Father Larry Mattingly at the time, who told him about the parish’s nascent ministry to Spanish-speaking youth. Antolín helped to bring this youth group to life, with the name *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey*. [*Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo*].

In addition to serving the *Jóvenes Unidos para Cristo Rey* for nine years, Antolín has also led our parish celebration of the live Stations of the Cross during the past 12 years. For ten years, he led our parish *matlachines*, a group of youth who perform dances of the indigenous people of Mexico for such occasions as the Feast of Our Lady of

Guadalupe. Antolín has served as a eucharistic minister for six years, and as the head of lectors at the 5:30 p.m. Sunday Mass for six years. He is also presently active in *Juventud Misionera*, a ministry of which he has been part for five years.

He shares, "We must be of service to others, and we must take the initiative to use the talents God has given us. We have to produce. We have to use the gifts God has given us, and when we share those gifts, we feel most alive!" Antolín's thirst for service and sharing his gifts has now extended to his foundation of a non-profit organization called *Caridadamor*, which continues the work he and his family began 12 years ago of serving poor children in Mexico. For the past two years, he has also been active in the *Coalición por los Derechos de los Inmigrantes* [Immigrant Rights Coalition].

When asked what he has learned through his service to the church and our parish, Antolín readily replies, "I've learned that the greatest way to receive is to give, and that when you share, you earn more and you grow more spiritually. You see the fruits of your works, and you see what you're capable of doing!"

For those who might be considering the sharing of their time and talent with our parish community, Antolín says, "Do it. It's a way to grow, and it's the only way you'll feel satisfied and fulfilled. Nothing can give you happiness, unless you're sharing with others the gifts God has given you."



Antonio Carbajal

Antonio Carbajal has actively served the community of Cristo Rey Catholic Church for 16 years. A native of Las Mesitas, Cerro de Abadelista, in the state of Mexico, Antonio recalls how the church was an integral part of his childhood. "My mother was very devout with first Fridays, and my father was part of the *Adoración Nocturna*," he recalls. "We used to walk four hours by donkey to arrive at church, then four hours home." Antonio recalls having to awake at 5:00 a.m. in order to arrive at the church in time for the 10:00 Mass, then the family would be home by 4:00 p.m. "What I enjoyed was that we had bread and coffee for breakfast (when we walked to church), things we never had in the country."

Antonio remembers the loneliness he experienced after moving to Austin in 1981. His brother and friends had introduced him to Cristo Rey Catholic Church. Recalling how he used to drink until 1989, Antonio shares, "Someone invited me to the *jamaica*, and I saw all the booths, and this attracted me. I began to search for friends here at Cristo Rey, and they began to talk to me about various things, and this gave me the strength to leave behind drinking. My new friends didn't talk about drinking, but about other things, and this helped me to leave it behind." Antonio points out the advantages of having such support from a church community: "If you're suffering from a vice, if you feel empty, you'll keep falling into the same until you have others to support you!"

Antonio first became involved in the parish by responding to an invitation. He jokes, "I remember coming to Mass one day, and there was an announcement that they needed someone to help tend to the parking lot. I was the only one to apply, so I got the job!"

His involvement with the church deepened, however, after a bus trip to Mexico. While aboard a bus during a trip to visit his family in Mexico, Antonio recalls being awakened in the middle of the night by a voice, calling, "Antonio, why don't you begin *Adoración Nocturna* at Cristo Rey?" Antonio sat up and turned around, only to discover that those around him were fast asleep. "I realized it wasn't anyone in the bus who was speaking to me," he said. Quickly acting on this call from God, Antonio gathered as much information as he could about the *Adoración Nocturna* during that visit to Mexico. He returned to Austin, to present the material to Fr. Francisco Gómez, associate pastor at Cristo Rey at that time, who replied, "If it has to do with the Blessed Sacrament, it has to be O.K."

Hence, the parish's *Adoración Nocturna* was begun by Antonio and his wife, María, and their ten children. After five months of sharing the practice as a family, though, Antonio received another message. He shares, "I heard the call again while sleeping. This time, the voice said, 'It's not just for you. You have to share it with others!' So I awoke, wondering how I would tell others about the *Adoración Nocturna*." Antonio quickly set out to print announcements for the church bulletin, he made pulpit announcements, and he received free advertising space from *El Mundo Newspaper*. Needless to say, people

came, and the *Adoración Nocturna* is now a strong, spiritual force within our parish community.

In addition to being active in the *Adoración Nocturna* for 16 years, Antonio helped ease the parish's parking situation for 11 years. For seven years, he participated in various breakfast groups. He presently serves on the parish's Stewardship Committee.

Largely as a result of the love he has received from his son, David, Antonio has a special interest in the church's ministry to persons with special needs. He readily shares of how he has come to see how God chose him and his wife to share their love with a special needs child. He says, "It's actually a holy call from God to have such a child, and to educate ourselves about special needs children. There's much misinformation – that it's a punishment by God, for instance – and many people hide their children, rather than bringing them to church. But we've come to discover that David is an angel of God among us. If people realized the blessing of having such a son, they'd want to enjoy such a blessing as well!" Antonio marvels at how God has called him and his wife to share life and love and strength with their son, David. "God looked favorably on us as a couple," he says, "and gave us this gift."

Antonio's present interest includes helping other persons with special needs children feel at home at Cristo Rey. He shares, "We enjoy our child, David, and we enjoy bringing him to Mass. There are so many people with such capacities – not incapacities – but we never see them at Cristo Rey. I felt a calling to see how we might help such people come to Mass." For this reason, Antonio and his family spent two days during this Holy Week constructing a new wheelchair ramp on the south side of our church facility, allowing easier access to our church for persons with special needs.

Reflecting on his years of ministry at Cristo Rey, Antonio shares, "By being involved in the ministries of the church, I've discovered a great unity in my family. By being active in ministry, I'm helped to find the words to speak with my children, to keep them on the 'straight and narrow.' By ministering to others, we also feel the satisfaction of giving to God through our service to others. God gives us health, knowledge and wisdom, and I know I need to place these gifts at His service, so as to leave a mark in this world through which we all pass."

Albert Cásarez

Albert Cásarez has generously shared of his time and talent in maintaining our parish's lawns and landscaping for nearly 30 years. A native of Austin, Albert was baptized in our parish community as a child. Raised as one of 13 children, Albert continues to attend weekly Mass with four of his brothers and sisters.

Albert recalls that when he was in his mid-20's, his brother, Telésforo ("Pops") had volunteered to tend to the parish's grounds. Both "Pops" and Albert worked as groundskeepers for the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Austin. Albert admits he really wasn't sure whether he believed "Pops" at that time, when he said that God would repay Albert in the long run for his service to the church. He shares, "Now that I understand more, I do believe that the Lord helps us out. The Lord has opened my eyes and helped me to live a good life."

During the past 30 years, Albert and "Pops" have spent at least four hours per week mowing parish lawns, trimming trees, edging sidewalks, and doing everything possible to maintain a well-groomed parish. Albert shares, "We want to keep the church beautiful and the grounds clean, so that more people feel at home at Cristo Rey."

Albert says he is gratified by the many compliments he receives from parishioners concerning the parish grounds. He is also quick to encourage others to help keep the church free of litter by placing trash and chewing gum in appropriate trash receptacles.

Albert invites others to become involved in the life of parish community. He says, "Volunteer to help our parish, and the Lord will repay you in some way. The Lord has definitely repaid me in a lot of ways!"



Raúl “Roy” Gómez

A native of Austin, Raúl Roy Gómez was baptized and received all his sacraments in our parish community. Raised on the 2500 block of East Third Street, Roy attended weekly Mass at Cristo Rey with his mother, Alvina, and his five siblings.

Roy shares that he first became involved in the parish through the hamburger booth of the *jamaica*. Soon, he was coordinating all the food booths for the event.

Roy has served the parish’s St. Francis of Assisi Joy Group for 17 years, and as a lector and eucharistic minister for 15 years. He coordinated the parish’s breakfast groups for eight years, and recently offered to assist with the coordination of this ministry again. Additionally, Roy has served on the parish’s Pastoral and Finance Council, for some six or seven years on each. Roy says that his greatest joy in ministry comes from visiting and taking the Eucharist to the homebound.

As a result of losing his 24-year-old daughter, Michelle, to an incident of domestic violence in 1994, Roy has become active in sharing his time and talent to educate people on domestic violence. He shares, “When I lost my daughter, Michelle, at first I blamed God, but it was through God’s grace that I overcame that tragedy. It was a learning experience. I learned how to go through such an experience, how to deal with it, and how to help other pass through it.” Roy readily speaks of how he believes God has called him to counsel and be present to others who face similar hardships, and he works with SafePlace as an advocate against domestic violence. He says, “I’ve been fortunate to associate with a lot of families who have lost someone to violence.”

Roy has also shared his time as a member of the Board of Directors of La FUENTE, a learning center on Springdale Road offering a number of programs, including GED classes in Spanish. He also helps to lead an annual drive to collect 5,000 oscillating fans which are distributed to the elderly of our community.

For those who might consider sharing of their time and talent with their parish community, Roy shares, “The rewards are way more than the sacrifice that you exert. The blessings are a hundredfold!”

José Juan Grimaldo

A native of Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato, José Juan Grimaldo readily shares his story of having left the church, then of returning to generously share of his time and talent with his parish community.

Raised by his grandparents as a child, José Juan recalls the 20-kilometer journey by foot to attend Mass each month at the nearest rural church. He shares that when he moved to Austin in 1982, he “had totally left the Church.” After six years in Austin, a friend invited him to Mass in our parish community. José Juan recalls, “I didn’t have anything else to do, so I accepted.” He shares the story of a spiritual experience that day, which left him reflecting on what had happened, and which impelled him to begin coming to the weekly Sunday Mass. “From there on, I began to grow in my faith,” he says.

José Juan recalls that his first invitation upon meeting his wife, Ana, was to invite her to Mass. “What are you doing tomorrow?” he asked her. He continued, “I’m going to Mass. Would you like to come?” Though they attended another parish at the time, when their oldest son was born, José Juan shares that they have returned to Cristo Rey, where Ana is now involved in the Christ Renews His Parish movement. Noting the warm welcome they have received in our parish community, José Juan notes, “We’re grateful to God and to all those brothers and sisters who have provided us such a welcome.”

After a course in evangelization many years ago, Juan José learned of the concept of *comunidades de base* (small-base communities), in which Catholics come together with others in their homes to reflect on the Word of God and to pray together. For the past five years, José Juan and his wife have hosted a weekly small-base community in their home for one hour each Thursday evening. He shares fond memories of the evenings in which his children Juan Carlos, José Alberto and Ana Lorena have joined him and his wife for such discussions. “It’s a chance for us to speak with our children,” he says. “They share with us their concerns and what they’re going through.”

For the past five years, José Juan has participated in our annual Live Stations of the Cross. He has coordinated the Sunday breakfast group for our parish small-base communities for the past four years. Most recently, José Juan joined our nascent parish security corps.

A plumber by trade, José Juan generously shares of his professional skills with our parish community, unclogging toilets, making repairs, and installing all the plumbing in our parish rectory. He says it is important for him to model service to his children. “They don’t understand now,” he comments, “but with our acts and our example, one day they’ll provide their own service to the Church.”

For those who might consider the possibility of more generously sharing of their time and talent with our parish community, José Juan shares, “I invite you to experience something new: helping others. It’s something that can’t be captured in words. It’s beautiful to serve others. I invite you to share that experience of feeling useful and valued. We all have something to share, and God brings many blessings to those who open themselves to His service.”



Fabiola Jaimes

A native of Mexico City, Fabiola Jaimes recalls how her weekly attendance at Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe inspired in her a sense of generously sharing her time and talent with her church community. She credits her parents for the Catholic education she received from the *Siervas de Jesús Sacramentado* (Servants of the Sacramental Jesus), a religious community of nuns serving in Mexico City. “Thanks to God, I’m from a Catholic family,” she shares. “My parent raised me in the Catholic religion.”

After graduating with a degree in English language and literature from the College of Philosophy and Letters of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Fabiola moved to Austin six years ago. She recalls first coming to the parish’s Prayer Group in order to support her niece, Miriam. She found, however, that the Prayer Group was also a great source of support for her personally. She shares that many of the songs and activities of the Prayer Group transport her to her experience with the nuns in Mexico. “The songs and activities are those that we used in Mexico. [Being part of the Prayer Group] is like being a girl in Mexico again!”

Fabiola recently joined the leadership team of the Prayer Group. Having participated in the Group’s “Life in the Spirit” seminar series, she currently helps to share these workshops for spiritual growth

with the charismatic prayer group at St. Anthony Marie Claret Catholic Church in Kyle, Texas. "It has been a beautiful experience," she shares. "We're helping people, and we're learning at the same time. We experienced the seminar once, but offering it now is another experience!"

Fabiola recently served as a hospitality minister during our parish's first monthly healing service in the style of the Basilica of San Juan del Valle. She says it was a touching experience to pray for those present who sought healing in their lives.

Fabiola is presently participating in a five-week course on stewardship. She says her participation in the course springs from her desire to discern how she might best share of her gifts and be of service to others.

With her niece, Miriam, Fabiola worked to create the palm crosses given out during our weekend Masses on May 3, the Feast of the Holy Cross. Together, they are presently making the *papel picado* which will adorn our worship space during Ordinary Time, which begins in mid-June. She says, "I've experienced my share of challenges in life, but instead of spending time at home dwelling on my problems, I've decided to reach out and help others. In this way, I feel very satisfied!"



Ramón & Celsa Jaimes

For over 13 years, our parish community has been blessed by the ministry of Ramón and Celsa Jaimes. Ramón and Celsa met in Ceibas de Trujillo (in the Municipio of Tiquicheo, Michoacán), where they grew up. After marrying, they lived in Mexico City for eight years, before relocating to Austin in 1981.

Celsa first came to know Christ during a charismatic retreat in Mexico City. She shares, "When I left Mexico and came to Austin, I asked the Lord, 'If you have a Spanish-speaking parish where I can serve, send me there.'" Celsa's friends encouraged her to check out Cristo Rey Catholic Church. She recalls her reaction after her first visit to our parish. "We loved it," she says. "It was exactly what I was looking for. I felt like I had come home."

The ministries of our parish community, which closely resembled the bible studies and ministries in which she involved herself in Mexico, attracted Celsa's attention. Ramón admits he was more hesitant to get involved. "I was a 'Sunday Catholic' he says. I would come to Mass with [Celsa], but that was it...until the Christian Family Movement caught my attention." Ramón and Celsa readily share stories of their involvement in the movement; they were among the first five couples in our parish community to bring to birth the movement in our diocese. Celsa smiles as she shares that she signed Ramón up for the Christian Family Movement without his knowledge. She recounts, "I signed him up, but I didn't tell him. I just told him that we were going to a meeting. And, like it or not, he came along!"

For three years, Ramón and Celsa coordinated the movement's breakfast group. They participated in the *Cursillo* movement for five years, and with a baptism preparation team for three years. For 13 years, they have served as eucharistic ministers for our 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass. They have also participated in the parish's Live Stations of the Cross for the past 13 years. During all these years, Ramón has played the role of a Roman soldier. "I have a bad guy's face," he explains. Celsa first assisted the Way of the Cross solely by making costumes for the apostles and the people of Jerusalem. In recent years, however, she has played the role of Blessed Virgin Mary or the women of Jerusalem. More recently, Ramón has been involved in the parish's Christ Renews His Parish movement for the past three years.

From repairing tables in the parish center to making the curtains which presently adorn the parish center windows, Ramón and Celsa have left their mark on our parish community. Now, though they have moved to Cedar Park, they still commute to Sunday Mass at Cristo Rey. "We don't want leave our parish," Celsa says. "We feel at home here. Cristo Rey is our home." She summarizes, "When you come to know Cristo Rey, it's like a dish that you like, and you eat and eat, and you can't get enough!"

When asked about his experience of ministry in the church, Ramón notes how his involvement has greatly helped him. He shares, "Years ago, I was just like any other person, but then I encountered

something very beautiful here at Cristo Rey. My life was changed when I came to know Jesus Christ at this church.”

Celsa glows about the way in which their children, who were raised in our parish community, now want to come back to Cristo Rey. She also shares of the joy she has received from sharing in ministries with her husband. “When you work with your spouse in the service of the Lord,” she shares, “you enjoy it more, because you find that you both ‘speak the same language’ and you feel complete in your ministry.” Ramón adds, “The Lord unites us [in marriage]. We just want to serve as an example of unity, in serving him and in serving others.”

Both Ramón and Celsa are quick to invite others to consider serving their parish community. Celsa admonishes, “Don’t be afraid. Many people don’t get involved (in the church) for fear of committing themselves. If you don’t take the first step, you never discover how beautiful it is to serve!”



Josefina “Josie” Juárez

A familiar face at the Cristo Rey *tiendita* (gift shop), Josefina “Josie” Juárez has long served our parish community. A native of Austin, Josie grew up at the intersection of Seventh and Waller. 49 years ago, she began attending Cristo Rey Catholic Church after marrying her husband, Benito. Josie first became involved in the parish’s weekly Sunday breakfast. Shortly thereafter, she assisted a parish child care program, tending to parish children while their parents attended Mass.

Josie recalls that 40 years ago, she was the first woman to serve as an usher in our parish community. Still today, she continues to actively serve in this ministry and to support others who wish to assist our parish community as ministers of hospitality. Josie is perhaps best known, though, for her presence in the *tiendita*, a small religious gift shop which operates out of the church’s former baptistery (and present bell tower). She shares that she has tended the store off and on for more than 30 years.

Josie readily shares of the great joy she receives from her ministry to the gift shop. “I used to wonder why I should come to church,” she says. “But then, when I started to get involved, I put my whole heart and soul into it.”

When she was first diagnosed with cancer in the 1990s, Josie came to more deeply treasure the life entrusted to us. The doctors told Josie then that she had only three years to live. “When doctors tell you that you only have a certain amount of time to live, it really hits you,” she shares. “I just asked God to help me, and I told him that if he let me live, I would serve him as long as lived.”

Josie is an example of selfless service within our community. Despite how she might feel on any given Sunday, she appears at the gift shop with a smile and an encouraging word, ready to generously share with others the life God has given her.

She is also quick to encourage others to become active in their parish community. She says, “You should get involved. Thank God every day when you get up, find something that you love to do, and do it with your whole heart and soul!”



Ignacio Loredó

A native of Austin, Ignacio Loredó is a lifelong member of our parish community. Raised as the oldest of 11 children in his family home on Díaz Street, he recalls visiting the original *Capilla de Cristo Rey* (Christ the King Chapel) and attending religious education classes in the empty lot now occupied by our church facility.

Ignacio shares that his generosity to our parish community began in the 1940s. “I always had a dollar or two in my pocket,” he says. “But people didn’t give dollars back then. That was a lot of money. I would give a dollar bill, and that was a lot of money, but the Lord always gave me good ‘interest’ on that dollar.”

Trained as a homebuilder, Ignacio says he was inspired by the generosity of Walter Carrington, the man for whom he built houses for 22 years. He recalls asking Mr. Carrington for the necessary wood to build the frames for our concrete sidewalks when the present church was completed 50 years ago. “He wasn’t Catholic, but he was

very generous," Ignacio recalls. "Several times, I asked him for a gift for [our] church, and he never said no." Ignacio shares that Mr. Carrington was a father-figure to him, providing for Ignacio's wife while Ignacio served in the Korean War, and helping him through the ranks of homebuilding, from setting foundations to supervising as a foreman and superintendent.

For six decades, Ignacio has generously shared his time, talent and treasure with our parish community. In the 1990s, he supported the ministry of the nascent Joy Group. With fondness, he also recalls the day on which the bronze statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which he donated in memory of his parents, was blessed on our parish grounds. He challenged those present to provide an accompanying statue of St. Juan Diego. "Y'all get Juan Diego over here," he said. "Our mother needs him." Ignacio still dreams of fashioning a bronze replica of the saint for our parish grounds.

Because of Ignacio's great generosity to our community during our parish's 2001 campaign to build our present religious education center, the parish office facility was recently named the Ignacio S. Loreda Office Building. We thank Ignacio and his family for being such great champions within our community!



Helen (Mendoza) Morales

A native of Austin and third-generation member of Cristo Rey Catholic Church, Helen Morales has generously and joyfully served the needs of our parish for many years.

Helen first became active in the parish in 1996 when Father Larry Mattingly invited her to serve on the parish's Finance Council. She continued this ministry during the past three years during the pastorate of Father Jesse Euresti. Helen has also coordinated the counting of our weekly parish collections for the past ten years. Each week, she gathers with a dedicated group of parishioners who volunteer five to six hours of their time on a Sunday afternoon to count all monies received by our parish during weekend Masses. With 18 years of banking experience, Helen shares that this ministry has been "my way of giving back to my parish community." This

ministry also greatly reduces the need for parish staff time to be dedicated to such projects.

Helen has served as a eucharistic minister and lector during our 8:45 a.m. Sunday Mass during the past five years. Most recently, she also served on our parish's *Jamacia* Committee for two years. Helen also generously shares of her time to volunteer in our parish office and to assist with the needs of our parish Religious Education program.

Helen notes how the involvement of her mother, Inez Mendoza, in our parish community for more than 20 years has served as an inspiration for her own involvement, and how her ministry in the church continues her mother's legacy. "My mother is extremely involved," Helen shares. "She was always at the church. If you wanted to see her or spend quality time with her, you had to come to church!"

When asked what she has learned about God through her ministry in the church. Helen responds, "I've learned that God is not a vindictive God. God doesn't punish us. God welcomes us all, no matter how educated or uneducated we are, no matter how unworthy we feel. And [I've learned] that through God, all things are possible."

For those who are considering the possibility of assisting the needs of our parish community, Helen points out the joy that one receives from generously sharing one's time and talent. "You experience great joy," she says, "when you get involved and give back!"



María Elena (Bazán) Ramírez

A native of Austin, María Elena (Bazán) Ramírez grew up at the intersection of East Third and Medina Streets, and has been a member of Cristo Rey Catholic Church since she helped to start the *Sociedad Guadalupana* in our parish community in 1990. Previously a member of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, she married Frank Ramírez in 1989, and moved to her current home in the block adjacent to our church. Noting her lack of involvement in the church at that time, she recalls, "I was one of those [Catholics] that came to church

[for Mass] and went home. I was a Sunday Mass person, and that was it."

Then, María Elena's sister, Frances Martínez, spoke with her about helping to form the *Sociedad Guadalupeana* at Cristo Rey. María Elena says, "I told her, 'I am going to help you, but I'm not going to join any other sodality at church!'" Soon, she jokes, the Franciscan priests of the parish quickly involved her in the life of the parish. "With Father Michael [Laltrella] and with Father Larry [Mattingly] and Father Jayme [Mathias], they got me involved in so many things—without my even realizing how involved I was!"

María Elena has been involved in the parish's *Sociedad Guadalupeana* for 19 years, has attended Leaders Group meetings for 13 years, was active in the *Grupo de Oración* for five years, in *Adoración Nocturna* for four years, and in the *Cursillo* movement for two years. She also helped to co-chair breakfast groups for a time. She notes that the greatest joy of ministry to her parish community has been in pulling people together for the glory of the Lord.

María Elena jokes that she and her husband, Frank, would wake up on Monday, tired from having prepared the parish breakfast the previous day, only to discover that they were scheduled to serve the breakfast again the following Sunday! She shares, "The first thing Frank would ask on Monday mornings was, 'Who has the breakfast this week?' And I would say, 'Sweetie, it's not us.' But it always seemed to turn out to be us!" She shares the anecdote that after Frank had become ill and she had to drop out of the breakfast groups for a time, one woman approached her at H-E-B and asked, "*Señora, ¿ya no trabaja en la Cristo Rey?* [Ma'am, have you stopped working at Cristo Rey?]" María Elena reflects, "I worked here so much, she thought I was a paid employee!"

María Elena credits—and jokingly blames—her husband, Frank, for getting her involved at Cristo Rey. She says he was a living example of the generous sharing of time and talent with one's faith community. "You could see him anywhere and everywhere [around the parish]," she says.

When asked what she has learned about herself since becoming active in the church, María Elena responds, "I've learned that when I give of myself, I grow spiritually, and I'm better able to transmit my devotion and energy to my children and grandchildren. I've also

learned that when we give to God, he gives back to us at least three times more than what we give.”

When asked what she would say to those who might consider becoming active in their parish community, María Elena says, “Do it. Don’t think about it. Don’t try to come up with excuses. If you’re asking whether you should get involved in the church, it’s a sign from the Lord: That’s what the Lord is calling you to do. Get involved. It’s the only way you’ll discover what your talents are!



David & Lily Reyes

David & Lily Reyes have long been involved in several ministries within our parish community. Natives of Austin, they began serving the needs of our parish community 14 years ago, at the invitation of the Franciscan priests who ministered to our parish at that time.

Lily is a third-generation member of our parish community, and remembers attending the parish’s youth programs under the leadership of Father Albert Ruiz. “We’d come and spend half the evening here, being involved in the youth program,” she says. David joined the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil in 1993. He credits Lily for his involvement in our parish community. He also jokes that a hamburger brought him into the Church, since he worked at the hamburger booth of our parish *jamaica* for a few years before marrying Lily. He shares, “After I was baptized and received my First Communion and Confirmation, I was open to helping in any way I could.”

Father Mike Latrello and Father John Elmer first approached David and Lily about ministering in our parish community. “I was hesitant,” David says, “but I decided to do it. It was an opportunity to be involved in the church.”

David and Lily have served as eucharistic ministers for 14 years, and as lectors for 11 years. For three years, they led the English-speaking Baptism Preparation Team, and for one year, they assisted the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. They entered the *Cursillo* retreat movement seven years ago, served as altar server coordinators for three years, and have served as Salesian Cooperators during the

past two years. Additionally, David has been part of the local Knights of Columbus council for 10 years. For the past 10 years, they have taught religious education classes, and they presently co-teach a class of second-year First Communion preparation for fourth- and fifth-grade students.

Lily shares that her greatest joy in sharing her time and talent has come through her ministry as a catechist, “because we’re able to pass on our faith,” she says. David agrees: “I like to share our faith with the kids. They’re open to learning, and they want to know more about our Catholic faith. One of the things we’re all called to do is to pass on our faith – not only to educate ourselves, but also to educate others about our Catholic faith.”

Lily admits that she was hesitant when first asked to become involved in the parish 14 years ago. “I didn’t feel I was worthy to do it,” she shares. “But as the years have gone by, and as I learn more about our faith, I’ve realized that it’s our baptismal right [to serve the Church]. It’s what we’re called to do as baptized persons: to be servants.”

For those who are considering getting involved in our parish community, David encourages, “Pope John Paul II said it best as pope: ‘Be not afraid.’ The Church is here for you. You can get involved as little or as much as you want, but get involved. You don’t have to jump in with both feet, you can ease into it. That’s what I did. I was just helping out at *jamaicas* at the time, and I wasn’t even Catholic! But if you hear God’s call, you need to answer it. God is here, waiting for us to get involved. God is calling all of us to come and be a part of the Church, to be a part of the community, to be involved beyond coming to Mass on Sunday!”



Arturo Rodríguez Leija

Arturo Rodríguez Leija has been active in our parish community since moving to Austin 14 years ago. A native of Ébano in the Huasteca Potosina of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, Arturo was raised in a very traditional Catholic family. He recalls his family’s celebration of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos every February 2. When he was

21 years old, Arturo attended a retreat sponsored by the Catholic charismatic renovation movement. He shares, "The Lord transformed my life at that retreat. I discovered that God exists. I had studied at the university, and everything had to be proven to me. But after that retreat, everything changed. Before I lived with resentments, bitterness and hatred in my heart, but after the retreat I began to experience healing of past hurts and the ability to forgive others."

After that retreat experience, Arturo became active in the youth group of his parish in Mexico, organizing festivals and dances to help build Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Pujalcoy, Ébanos, San Luis Potosí. At 25, he married Irma González, and they soon moved to Austin where they gave birth to their children Jonathan, Denise and Lizzette.

Arturo and Irma began coming to Cristo Rey with his uncle and aunt, Jorge and Martha Enríquez, who provided music for the parish's 6:00 p.m. Saturday Mass. Arturo recalls that he worked at a Chinese restaurant, but that he would always ask for Mondays off, in order to be able to attend the parish's Prayer Group.

Arturo has attended the Prayer Group since 1996. For three years, he served as coordinator of the ministry. He has also been active in Sunday breakfast groups for 10 years. For 10 years, he was active as a lector at the 6:00 p.m. Saturday Mass and at the 7:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Sunday Masses. He presently serves on the parish's Stewardship Committee, and was recently named to the Diocesan Committee for Charismatic Renewal.

Arturo shares, "When we discover that all that we have comes from God, we become more generous. We also come to see how it is that in serving our neighbor, we're serving God."

For those who might consider becoming involved in our parish community, Arturo encourages, "God has a day, an hour and a minute for each person, but you and I have the last word. We can move God's clock forward. Don't wait until you have problems. Don't wait until your marriage is nearly destroyed. Don't wait until your children are getting involved in drugs. Today is the day. Come, see that the God you learned about as a child is not a punishing God, but a God who gave his life out of love for you."

Celia Ann “Sally” Velazquez

A native of Thrall, Texas, Celia Ann “Sally” Velázquez moved to Austin in 1971 and began coming to Cristo Rey Catholic Church shortly thereafter. She recalls first becoming involved in the parish’s youth ministry programs with Father Louis Pavlicek. She jokes, “My mother wouldn’t let us roam the streets, but she would let us come to church.” For this reason, Celia would often tag along with her sister and be present at the parish.

Frank Ramírez later invited Celia to be a “go-for” for the Men’s Club, during their annual set-up of booths for the parish *jamaica*. Over the years, Celia has served as a Eucharistic Minister and a member of the *Jamaica* Committee, and she has helped lead the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and the Catholic Order of Foresters. After some years of assisting the needs of our parish religious education program, Celia now teaches fourth grade religious education classes. She says her greatest joys in ministry spring from helping and being present to children. She recalls the invitation of Sister M. Guadalupe Medina, F.M.A., who once told Celia that “Here in this church, there are a lot of children who need help. There’s always someone who needs a hug or someone to talk to.”

Celia has been a member of the Salesian Cooperators since the inception of that group, and she presently serves on the parish’s Stewardship Committee. Celia enjoys photography, and helped to capture photos of parish children with the Easter Bunny during its recent visit to our parish community.

Celia recognizes that different people have different interests and skills, and that those interests and skills can be exercised for the benefit of our faith community. “There are different ministries, depending on what you’re interested in,” she says. “Come and join one of them. Whatever you feel you can do, come and share your time. When we share our money and talents, it gives us joy, it brings happiness into our lives, and God multiplies what we have.”

Reflecting on her own experience of sharing time and talent with our parish community, Celia concludes, “The more I work in the church, the more blessing I’ve gotten. I’ve had a wonderful experience!”

Appendix C

Parish Love Notes

2010-2011

The following contributions by parishioners, solicited as part of Cristo Rey's annual "Parish Love Notes" contest for Valentine's Day in 2010 and 2011, provide some insight into the love possessed by parishioners for their parish community at that time.

My Parish Community of Cristo Rey

My parish community of Cristo Rey
 is made up of many members,
 all unique in their own way.
 No matter how long
 I have been away,
 I am always welcomed back
 with a warm smile,
 loving hugs and welcoming words,
 made to feel as if I was never gone,
 as if my heart of Cristo Rey
 never missed a beat.
 Always patient and loving.
 never judging,
 always made to feel you are home;
 this is what I love the most
 about my parish community
 of Cristo Rey.

– Diana Coy (2010)



Why I Love Cristo Rey Parish

I love this parish because there is a lot of enthusiasm for the things of God. The majority of the parishioners contribute in many ways to the celebrations of the different feasts of the liturgical year.

There is much unity among the parishioners and they cooperate with the Pastor in many ways. The church is always clean and beautiful. Those in charge do a good job.

But above all, we have a very dedicated Pastor who imitates Jesus in his kindness and generosity. He talks to everybody with kindness, patience and love.

—Sr. Maria Becerril, F.M.A (2010)



Why I Love My Parish

I love my parish because it is alive!

I love my parish because there is enthusiasm.

I love my parish because there is unity.

I love my parish because we love Jesus & Mary.

I love my parish because we celebrate feasts, traditions & *pachangas*.

I love my parish because it is unique.

It is our CASA.

I love you, Cristo Rey!

—Sr. M. Guadalupe Medina, FM.A. (2010)



What I like in this parish:

I like the newspaper!

I like the celebration of traditions.

I am happy that we got many children and youth.

I like when the parish groups collaborate.

I like the generosity of volunteers.

—Sr. Elizabeth Villanueva, F.M.A. (2010)

Cristo Rey, you're beyond and above.
 I gotta pick ONE thing I love?
 Well...I love that *mariachi* band.
 It makes me wanna clap my hand.
 Singing God's praise all day long.
 Come on, boys, just one more song!
 Music is how I praise the Lord.
 With them boys playin',
 I'll never get bored.
 Every time I see a frown,
 I know it ain't Cristo Rey, in my town.
 My toes a-tappin' and hands a-clappin'
 they could start ANYONE a-rappin'!
 So please, please, Father Jayme, dear:
 It's that mariachi band I wanna hear!
 'cuz mariachi Masses are the place to be.
 They go so well with a good homily!
 Cristo Rey, so beyond and above:
 Your mariachi Masses are just what I love!

— Elise Plaisance (2010)



What could I say about Cristo Rey Parish?

What do I love about Cristo Rey, "Tu Casa"?

Cristo Rey received me with wide open arms and heart. It has really become "Mi Casa." Here reigns a most welcoming and cordial atmosphere, a deep respect and valuing of different peoples and cultures, a generosity which begins with the Pastor and is emulated by all in the many ministries. The smiles that beam from their eyes warm the hearts and make life a bit more bearable for those whose days brim with difficulties and hardship. While they worship together, they become part of a much greater reality – the finite touching the infinite. The people seem drawn to Cristo Rey by an insatiable desire to encounter God and be filled with His love and peace and to spill them over onto others.

Cristo Rey is indeed the Community of Traditions. To it we could apply what Pope John XXIII said, "I love traditions...I invent one every day!" With Fr. Jayme at the lead, traditions are re-discovered, unearthed, celebrated, and re-lived with heart-felt enthusiasm by everyone. The most important part of each of these events is the Eucharist. In myriad ways, these celebrations bring an "epiphany of beauty" (Pope John Paul II) to the whole atmosphere and mark new seasons as the sanctuary and the church are also decked in fresh new grandeur. This "epiphany of beauty" certainly includes the Majesty of Mariachi Masses and, at the end, the sharing in fraternal agape of surprises, *antojitos* and meals outside the church or at the parish center.

Lots more could be said. It would all fade if you only hear about it. Come and experience it for yourselves!

—Sr. Mary Gloria Mar, F.M.A (2010)



Christ who
Remains with us and
In us,
Sustaining us
Together with
Others who believe and
Receive the truth
Everyday, just waiting for
You!

—Bertha López (2011)



Loving Cristo Rey is as easy as loving cake.
You come to hear the Word of the Lord, to feel so great.
Father Jayme is the best, because he loves me,
And if you come to see, you will NEVER leave.

—Ricardo Flores (2011)

To know our staff from Cristo Rey
 makes our day go their way.
 To see their smiles on their faces
 gets us there every day.
 We appreciate all their work
 that is shared,
 just to know they will always be there.

—Gloria J. Sierra & Ana M. Luián (2011)



Love and friendship
 go hand in hand
 Love for my parish, Cristo Rey
 cannot be described.
 Friends come and go,
 leaving Cristo Rey
 sometimes without a goodbye.
 But my love for Cristo Rey will never die.
 Somebody said.
 "Do not confuse love with duty"
 No confusion.

I have love
 for my Cristo Rey Parish,
 and I also have a duty
 to do for my parish
 anything I can.

For Cristo Rey
 es mi casa,
 mi tesoro.

—Juanita López (2011)



Well, here I am, with my parish love note!
 I could not miss adding my few notes
 to sing the praises of Cristo Rey.
 So, let us first enter the church,
 and then make a pilgrimage outside,
 as our hearts enlarge and brim over with thanks.

I love the church
 arrayed in elegant simplicity for the different seasons.
 I love the fervent liturgies and celebrations of church feast days,
 with the short, "show-and-tell," unforgettable homilies
 and traditions revived and lived in memorable ways.

Let us enter a bit deeper and get a glimpse of what is at the heart.
 I love the spirit of generosity and cordial welcoming
 which, from the top, trickles down.
 "Trickles" down?

Better to say, splurges and drenches
 and wets all the benches,
 soaks us to the bones,
 and puts a smile on our faces!

Outward signs revealing a profound love of God and others:
 It is only a prelude, a tangible icon of the spirit of generosity,
 openness, enthusiasm, and cordial welcoming of Father Jayme,
 who every day canonizes quite an array of people he meets.

Like the water, this spirit rushes and impregnates the staff,
 the ministry leaders, and lots of parishioners.
 We lift our minds and hearts in a hymn of thanks to the Lord
 for the communion and love we live at Cristo Rey

Now, let me tell you about my daily pilgrimage by Cristo Rey.
 Every day, more than once a day, as I go past the church,
 I make a pilgrimage of faith.

I cross the street and imagine myself climbing Mount Cubilete,

where I meet Christ the King, and ask him to be King of my heart,
not just king in name – as Fr. Jayme preaches – but in reality.

I go a bit further,
Now it is time to climb Tepeyac and salute my Queen.
I ask her to let my brothers and sisters
feel her maternal, loving presence.

From Tepeyac, I walk by the Cenacle,
the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.
I ask the Lord to let me be St. John and rest my head on his heart.
No more need for words, only the sense of a Presence
which permeates the rest of my day.

There I remain,
even as I continue to the second floor of the *Escuelita*.
Now I find myself in Mornese, at the Valponasca,
where at any time of the day,
from my window I gaze at the Cenacle,
and my longing heart beats its thanks for you all!

–Sr. Mary Gloria Mar, F.M.A. (2011)



*Cuando más sola me encontraba,
llegaste tú,
y en ti me di cuenta
que tú eres a quien siempre busqué
Gracias por fortalecer mi fe.
¿Qué más te puedo decir?
Sí, eres lo mejor
que ha pasado sobre mí
Te amo, Iglesia de Cristo Rey*

–Sara M. Zavala (2010)



El Amor Vive en el Corazón de los Valientes

*Te escribí un poema, lo escribió mi corazón
q' se enamoró al mirar a una estrella de amor, de amor.
No puedo decir "te amo". Te amo, mi amor. No puedo decir "te amo".*

*Soy un soñador, inspirado a tu belleza
q' se enamoró al mirar a una estrella de amor, de amor.
Yo puedo decir "te amo". Te amo, mi amor. Yo puedo decir "te amo".*

-Luis Ramón Vadillo (2010)



Cristo Rey

*Mi parroquia se llama "Cristo Rey"
el nombre es lo que me gusta,
porque rinde honor a Él.*

*El, quien es verdad y amor,
y me alegro si me dicen:
Vamos a la Casa del Señor.*

*Y ya lo cuenta la historia:
que no reinó en esta tierra,
pero es el Rey de la Gloria.*

*Rey del Universo entero
y Rey de mi corazón,
Rey de reyes, el primero
y del mundo Redentor.*

*Un mandamiento ha dejado
y es la ley para el cristiano:
Hay que amar al enemigo,
y hay que amar a nuestro hermano.*

-Evely Hernández (2010)

*Con gran cariño, alegría y gozo,
 Reparto y comparto el gran amor por mi parroquia,
 Inspirado por los grandes, valiosos y maravillosos
 Siervos que mi Dios ha puesto en ella, y
 Tomados de la mano de Dios y de ellos, podremos
 Obtener la realización de nuestros sueños como parroquia.*

*Amo estos sueños. Amo los
 Retos que estos siervos nos dan. Amo las
 Extensas y cansadas tareas que estos siervos inspirados por Dios nos
 brindan. Amo la perseverancia de todos ellos
 Y espero e invito a todos a amar estos sueños. Feliz Día de Amor y la
 Amistad: el amor a mi parroquia y la amistad entre nosotros como
 parroquia.*

-Gerardo Santamaría (2010)



Para la Iglesia Cristo Rey

*Cómo no estar contentos
 Recibiendo bendición
 Invocando a mi Jesús.
 Santificado su nombre
 Todos juntos alabamos
 Oh Jesús Sacramentado*

*Ruega, ruega por nosotros
 En nuestras necesidades
 Y también en alegrías.*

*Todos viviremos para siempre
 Unidos en Cristo.*

*Casa de los afligidos,
 Adoración de mi Cristo,
 Sanidad de los enfermos.
 Amén, por siempre. Amén.*

–Sra. López (2010)

¡Viva Cristo Rey!

*Mariachis en Misa
bilingüe, for sure.*

Amistad para todos.

Un padre cambiando

“pecador” por “pescador”

fervor en sus labios.

Con tacos y caldo

al gusto de todos

en muestra de amor.

¡Viva Cristo Rey!

–Yolanda Velásquez (2010)



Con mucho cariño y amor le escribo a esta Gran Parroquia, que me llena de amor y alegría, y con los párrocos más alegres y cariñosos, que hacen, que cada día me enamore más de Cristo Rey. Yo nunca había sentido tanto cariño y amor por una iglesia, pero nada más conocer a la Iglesia Cristo Rey y me enamoré locamente, que a diario mi corazón grita, “¡Viva Cristo Rey!” La iglesia de mis amores, gracias por hacerme tan feliz.

–José Daniel Pérez (2010)



Jesús Ramírez de nacionalidad mexicana le mando esta carta con toda mi alma a mi queridísima Parroquia de Cristo Rey por ser una parroquia comprensiva y con muchas tradiciones de nuestros países y por darnos la oportunidad de trabajar y formar parte de unos ministerios y apoyarnos en las necesidades espirituales. Espero en Dios que siempre sea Cristo Rey la parroquia y el refugio de los necesitados, en aprender más de las leyes y grandezas de Dios. Amén.

–Jesús Ramírez (2010)



Mi Parroquia Cristo Rey

*Es mi casa donde me siento
como un rey. ¿Por qué?
Porque estoy
con el Rey de reyes y señor de señores.
Por eso siempre digo
que Cristo Rey es mi casa,
y le sirvo con amor.*

–Jorge Enríquez (2010)

***Cristo Rey Es Mi Parroquia***

*Cristo Rey es mi parroquia
llena de luz, colores
y muchas, muchas tradiciones.*

*Con un párroco
con mucho carisma,
así es el Reverendo Mathías,
que cada que nos da la homilía
nos instruye con gran filosofía.*

*Tiene también un gran número
de feligreses trabajadores,
constantes y muy alegres,
que comparten sus talentos
en varios ministerios,
siempre dedicados
y muy sinceros.*

*Todo eso y más
es mi parroquia,
y pertenecer a ella me emociona
por todas esas grandes cosas
que la adornan.*

*Aquí la Palabra de Dios
es la ley,
así que sólo
me queda por proclamar:
"Viva Cristo Rey"*

–Alejandro García-Cervantes (2010)



*¡Comunidad de Cristo Rey!
Escribiendo estas líneas para descifrar
cuál es realmente el amor.
Descubrí que el amor
no es una simple emoción
que hoy nace
y mañana termina.
El amor es para siempre.
Amor es darte a los demás
como Dios se nos dio.
Los amo en Dios para siempre,
hermanos de Cristo Rey.*

–Antolín Aguirre (2010)



*Cristo Rey
En la vida hay caminos
en donde los destinos
se han juntado
por designios del Señor Jesús;
pero al detenerse
por un momento
se encuentran la verdad, la paz
y el encuentro personal*

*con Cristo Rey
para levantar más esperanzas
y nuevos retos
para ser testigos fieles
del amor inagotable
y de su gracia insaciable.
En cualquier parte
donde nos deseen volvemos.*

–Guadalupe Benítez (2010)



*A mi iglesia:
Siendo ésta la comunidad
en la cual yo he crecido
como un verdadero católico
y no sólo como creyente,
es por eso que yo estoy
enamorado de Cristo Rey.*

*Conocer a Dios
Realmente para mí es un
Impulso para
Salir adelante y
Triunfar con Cristo,
O resignarme a no*

*Re-nacer y morir
En la oscuridad
Y derrotado.*

Gracias mi Dios!!!

–Jorge Mendoza (2010)



Quiero expresar un pequeñísimo, bien casi microscópico pero muy profundo y entrañable sentimiento de amor. Necesito decírselo para enlazar energía a nivel magisterio. Bien, en realidad esperaba un poquito más de ti porque tus esfuerzos fueron grandes y sólo lograste limpiar una piedra, una piedra que me llena las paredes de alegría, dicha y felicidad. Porque de esa piedra pueden brotar ríos de agua viva. Aunque para eso, necesito que sigas cantando, aunque canta más un jilguero que tú. Es muy bien. Yo también comienzo a extrañarte, Iglesia Cristo Rey.

–Eliazar (2010)



*Para mi adorada Iglesia Cristo Rey
Quiero darle las gracias a mi parroquia
por todas las bendiciones que me ha dado,
porque aquí fue mi boda y los bautismos y comuniones de mis hijos.
Y aquí Dios me dio la oportunidad
de servirle como ministro de la comunión.
Aquí me siento con mucha paz y gracias por todo.*

–Fabián Nieto (2010)



*A mi Parroquia Cristo Rey
La parroquia es...mi segundo hogar donde encuentro la paz, alegría, trabajo
y donde descubro q' tengo una gran responsabilidad con mi prójimo. En
ella, he encontrado una nueva familia. He descubierto el complemento que a
veces busco afuera y no encuentro. Pero aquí me recuerda mi servicio en la
edad cuando yo era joven y cuando empecé a conocer a Dios. La parroquia
es algo donde me puedo desarrollar como persona, donde conozco más a
Dios a través de los hermanos. Descubro q' hay una necesidad tremenda en
cada persona. Gracias doy a Dios por mi parroquia, Cristo Rey.*

–Arturo Rodríguez (2010)



¿Qué puedo decir del lugar donde reside el más grande amor? El Rey del amor, Cristo Rey. El trabajo no es trabajo, sino un yugo suave y ligero cubierto del verdadero amor.

–Clem Morán (2010)



*Querida Parroquia de Cristo Rey,
Te amo por ser tan linda y ser mi casa.
Te amo.*

–Antonio Carbajal (2010)



*Cristo Rey,
por darme la oportunidad de dar mi servicio con amor en y a tu iglesia.*

*Al
Mensaje
Otorgado y
Recibido,*

*Amor
Le*

Sirve

*En
Respuesta*

*Viva e
Incondicional, como
Cristo*

*Inmortal hizo con
Onor.*

–Rigoberto Álvarez G. (2010)

*Yo amo a mi parroquia porque aquí conocí
el verdadero amor en Cristo Jesús.*

*El amor que nunca se acaba y sincero, sin condición.
Tengo el amor de mis hermanos en Cristo Jesús
y tenemos un párroco muy carismático.
Gracias a mi parroquia.*

–Delia León B. (2010)



*Cuando llegué aquí a los Estados Unidos, me sentía muy triste porque
había dejado a mi familia y todos. No sabía qué hacer. Llegué un día
miércoles, pero un día domingo me invitaron a Misa aquí a la iglesia Cristo
Rey a darle gracias a Dios por todo. Fue la primera iglesia q' conocí.
Aquí empecé a tener amigos. Me siento como si todos fueran mi familia.
Aquí me he quedado y aquí me quedara hasta q' Dios lo permita.
Gracias, Cristo Rey, por todo, por ser una iglesia tan padre, tan unida,
tan amable. Aquí me siento como en mi "casa". I love you, Cristo Rey.*

–F.G. (2010)



Tu Casa

*Iglesia de Cristo Rey
por gracia de Dios, "Tu Casa".
Casa que sólo al entrar te sientes en la presencia
de nuestro Señor Jesús.*

*Que te toma de la mano
y te conduce amoroso
a la presencia del Padre
y te invita a que le digas
todo lo que a ti te duela.*

*Si viniera con pesar, se cambiará en alegría.
Si tienes resentimiento, conocerás el perdón.
Si tus dudas tú le dices, te regalará la fe.
Las tristezas que trajeras, hallaras la fortaleza.*

*Si el rencor te atormentara, hallarás la paz del alma.
Y si tu alma trajera cualquier otro sufrimiento,
ven a Cristo Rey "Tu Casa"*

*donde se le da alabanza
y también se glorifica,
y todos damos las gracias
por esta gran bendición.*

*Ésta es la casa de Cristo. Ésta es la casa de Dios.
Es tu casa, y es mi casa, y es la casa de todos.*

*Donde hombres, mujeres y niños
reciben y dan amor.*

*Unidos como familia,
como familia de Cristo
y de la Madre celestial,
como familia de Dios.*

Amén. Amén. Amén.

–Santos Zapata T. (2011)



*Clamo yo en tu presencia
Recibir del Dios divino
Iluminación en mi alma.
Silencioso aquí en tu altar,
Toda pena te confieso,
Omnipotente Señor.
Ruego encuentre yo favor
En tu amor, Señor Jesús,
Y me des la paz de Dios.*

–Santos Zapata T. (2011)



*A mi querida Iglesia Cristo Rey,
yo te amo porque en ti encontré los primeros amores,
amores que dieron la razón de vivir.
Cuando recorro tus grandes y pequeñas instalaciones,
recuerdo el primer día de mi llegada a la celebración dominical.*

Tú, Cristo Rey, "Mi Casa"

*Todo el tiempo, abiertas tus puertas, para acoger a los demás
Único lugar donde me siento en casa*

Con la confianza de expresar mis sentimientos, emociones.

Risas, lágrimas, alegrías y triunfos.

Irradias de buena vibra al darnos la bienvenida e invitarnos a

Soñar juntos como hispano-parlantes que somos.

Todos juntos como hermanos, trabajamos y trabajamos...y

Oramos al Señor para bendecir el esfuerzo realizado de cada año.

Reinando el amor de Jesús, y los domingos que no vengo a Misa

Extraño los encantos de Cristo Rey...

Y por eso y muchas, muchas cosas más,

es que te amo cada día más a ti:

Cristo Rey, "Mi Casa".

(2011)



Mi Casa, Cristo Rey

Sólo al ver tu imagen

Se alegra mi corazón

Y al entrar por tus puertas

Siento tanto amor y pasión.

Ésta es mi iglesia,

Mi casa que siempre busqué

Y sé que hasta el fondo de mi alma

Que siempre te amaré.

*Cuando estaba sola y perdida
Con una tormenta en mi alma,
Fue aquí en esta casa
Que yo encontré la calma.*

*Mis lágrimas eran de tristeza
Pero ahora son de alegría
Por haber encontrado mi casa.
Ya no me siento perdida.*

*20 años sin confesarme,
Tantos pecados cargaba
Pero ese día de confesión
Después me sentí desahogada.*

*Muchas lágrimas salían
Sobre mi rostro sin cesar
Y al salir fuera de las puertas
Un gran viento sentí pasar.*

*En "mi casa" encontré esa paz,
Lo que mi corazón deseaba.
Y ahora, tres años después,
Esta casa es mi morada.*

*Mi iglesia es Cristo Rey,
"Mi casa" sin fallar.
Con toda la fuerza en mi alma
Siempre te voy a amar.*

-Peggy Morales (2011)



Cristo Rey, Mi Parroquia, Mi Casa

*En mi parroquia se puede apreciar el arte,
el arte que se refleja en muchas formas.
En mi parroquia, Cristo Rey, podemos ver
el nacimiento del Niño Jesús en la celebración navideña,
toda una obra de arte y fe.
Vemos un crucifijo grande, que nos recuerda
que Jesús murió en la cruz por nosotros.
Vemos a Jesús Rey del universo.
Es una figura grande, toda una obra de arte.
Estas tres obras de arte en mi parroquia
nos unen como comunidad, también una obra de arte de Dios.
Aquí en mi parroquia, hay una diversidad de personas,
como las flores de diferentes colores
que adornan los altares de mi Cristo Rey.
Aquí también se puede apreciar el arte culinario
de diferentes países y diferentes regiones.
Aquí en mi parroquia, volví a recordar de dónde vengo,
mis tradiciones, celebraciones y la música.
Aquí en mi Cristo Rey, somos uno.*

–Juanita López (2011)



El Reencuentro de Amor

Al venir a este país, yo pensaba que había abandonado todo lo que más amaba en México: mi familia, mi casa y lo que más amaba, mi parroquia. Al cruzar el río, mi corazón se entristeció al pensar que en este país no iba a encontrar lugar como el que estaba dejando: mi parroquia, donde Cristo Jesús y su Iglesia se habían quedado del otro lado de ese río.

¿Y cuál va siendo mi sorpresa después de algunas semanas de haber llegado a este estado y de sentirme la persona más sola? Descubrí que mi parroquia se había venido antes que yo, ¡y aquí estaba esperándome con los brazos abiertos! Eso fue lo que sentí al ver a Cristo crucificado. Ahí estaba inmóvil,

esperándome, dispuesto a abrazarme y perdonarme todo. "Siempre he estado a tu lado a donde tú vayas."

No pude contener las lágrimas de emoción al sentirme en mi propia casa. Porque el amor que sostiene mi vida y que yo creía que había abandonado, lo encontré aquí en Cristo Rey, "Mi Casa". Él llegó antes que yo, para esperarme con los brazos abiertos. Gracias, Cristo Rey, amor de mi vida.

–Patricia Bastida (2011)



La Gran Casa

*Agilizo el paso para llegar a tiempo
a la emotiva asamblea,
exitoso espacio en medio de ella
instruyendo a niños, dos ángeles en el altar,
con diferente acento,
pero con un mismo fervor,
oran por su Iglesia.*

*Iglesia formada por diferentes razas
pero sin lugar a duda, una sola familia*

*A mi Iglesia: me has marcado
con grandes momentos de paz.*

*Es menos la pena
de estar ausente de mi patria,
pues en ti encuentro
mis tradiciones y conozco nuevas.
Es grande la lista de lo que ofreces,
pero sé con certeza que sacias las
necesidades de tus feligreses,
pues tu distintivo es la caridad.*

*Eres única, ejemplo de amor.
Eres perfecto modelo a imitar.
Eres la ternura de la luna*

*y la calidez del sol,
 los colores del arco iris
 y la transparencia de los ríos.
 Eres la mejor.
 No fue mi mente quien lo pensó.
 Fuiste tú, mi iglesia, Cristo Rey,
 ¡quien me inspiró!*

–V. Ávila (2011)



Carta de Amor a mi Iglesia Cristo Rey

*Quizá no lo diga mucho, pero tu amor es un regalo muy especial para mí.
 Siempre puedo contar contigo, pase lo que pase. Me apoyas. Me animas.
 Contigo nada parece imposible. Me escuchas, mi Cristo Rey, y me
 comprendes siempre cuando más falta me hace. En los momentos más
 importantes y en los pequeños momentos, tu amor es algo de verdad, algo
 en lo cual puedo confiar. No exagero al decir que eres una parte esencial, mi
 Cristo Rey, del significado y la inspiración de mi vida. Y espero que sepas,
 mi Cristo Rey, en el Día de San Valentín y siempre, cuánto te aprecio con
 todo mi amor de mí para ti. Y te amo.*

–Rita Montelongo (2011)



Index of Surnames

- Abalo, 132
 Abalos, 122
 Acevedo, 29
 Acosta, 53, 55, 58, 62,
 63, 65, 71, 81, 85, 90,
 102, 122, 138, 145,
 159, 189, 321, 323,
 343
 Adams, 21, 24, 32, 33,
 34, 39, 49, 50, 57,
 209
 Adela, 215
 Aguilar, 349, 350
 Aguirre, x, 122, 138,
 268, 270, 272, 321,
 353, 383
 Alamilla, 349
 Alba, 122
 Albertano, 320
 Alcalá, 232, 350
 Aldava, 69, 71, 132
 Alemán, 95, 198
 Almanza, 204
 Alvarado, 132
 Álvarez, 72, 119, 132,
 291, 314, 321, 323,
 343, 386
 Ana, 172, 203
 Anguiano, 132
 Angulo, 305
 Arévalo, 131, 132
 Arévalo, 119
 Armendarez, 119, 122
 Arocha, 104, 122, 138,
 145, 171, 195, 322
 Arratibel, 72, 73, 81
 Arredondo, 78, 86
 Arrellina, 122
 Arroyo, 321, 323
 Arteaga, 321, 323
 Arzate, 269
 Astrán, 119
 Austin, 12, 14
 Avendaño, 321
 Ávila, 22, 26, 28, 46, 48,
 49, 51, 52, 53, 56, 57,
 63, 65, 86, 323, 343,
 344, 393
 Aymond, 117, 262, 265,
 280, 288, 291, 300,
 305
 Bailey, 35, 36
 Balandrán, 119, 132
 Balzola, 30, 31
 Banda, 120, 131, 134
 Banks, iv, 23, 99
 Barkley, 7, 12, 13, 16,
 17, 20, 22, 34
 Barrientos, 49, 50, 52,
 59, 61, 66, 183, 188,
 323
 Bastida, 392
 Bazán, 211, 219, 223,
 237, 239, 247, 252,
 253, 263, 305, 309,
 344, 366
 Becerril, 218, 321, 323,
 352, 373
 Benítez, 321, 323, 384
 Bernal, 197, 201, 212,
 213, 219, 220, 221,
 223, 226, 229, 235,
 237, 239, 244, 245,
 247, 248, 253, 267,
 275, 281, 286, 314,
 330, 343
 Blanco, 312, 350
 Bloomquist, 132
 Boiko, ix, 239, 240, 343,
 350
 Bomar, 117
 Bonilla, 132
 Bosco, v, xi, 3, 70, 78,
 91, 92, 93, 110, 113,
 114, 141, 284, 316,
 317, 325, 329, 351
 Briganti, vi, vii, 61, 64,
 92, 93, 100, 105, 106,
 107, 108, 109, 110,
 113, 115, 116, 117,
 121, 125, 130, 136,
 137, 138, 139, 140,
 141, 142, 143, 144,
 146, 148, 149, 150,
 151, 160, 164, 169,
 173, 174, 175, 182,
 190, 212, 343, 349
 Briseño, 21, 24, 53, 166,
 246, 247
 Brooke, 201
 Bucio, 310, 314
 Bullock, 8
 Busch, 72, 73
 Bush, 304
 Butero, 269
 Byers, 174
 Byrne, 77
 Caballero, 132
 Cabrera, 270
 Cadena, 45
 Calderón, 71, 90
 Calgaro, 350
 Calhoun, 18
 Calvo, 159
 Camacho, 26, 71, 264,
 279, 321, 341
 Camarena, 313
 Campise, 112, 116, 125,
 154, 167, 169, 171,
 178, 181, 188, 189,
 190, 191, 192, 193,
 204, 206, 318, 343,
 349
 Canales, 17
 Cancino, 86, 91, 138
 Candelas, 120
 Cano, 36, 321, 325
 Cantú, 57, 63, 66, 104,
 122, 132, 134, 138,
 145, 322, 343
 Capuchino, 71
 Carbajal, 314, 321, 323,
 354, 386
 Carcaño, 232
 Carlín, 90, 132
 Carmona, 45, 46, 62,
 73, 75, 80, 82, 86, 90,
 97, 122, 132

- Carrasquillo, 313, 321, 323
 Carrillo, 120, 310, 314, 321
 Carrington, 364
 Cásarez, 116, 130, 131, 232, 321, 323, 357
 Casas, 42, 47, 48, 62, 90, 117, 176, 182
 Castellón, 116, 351
 Castillo, 71, 120, 122, 134, 264, 273, 321, 352
 Castro, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 42, 44, 55, 87, 131, 209, 249, 259, 343, 349
 Castruito, 132
 Cavazos, 71, 86, 120, 323
 Cavelier, 10
 Cázares, 38, 44, 45, 51, 57, 66, 68, 89, 95, 98, 132, 171
 Ceballo, 267
 Cerda, 131, 132
 Cerezo, 212, 349
 Cermeno, 132
 Cervántez, 321
 Cervenak, 65, 209, 216
 Chalupa, 222, 350
 Chapa, 71, 77, 94, 98, 112, 120, 122, 123, 132, 145, 152, 172, 197, 219, 249, 266, 287, 333, 343, 344
 Chathan, 195
 Chávez, viii, 16, 29, 33, 34, 37, 184, 248, 278, 314, 350
 Cipac de Aquino, 9
 Clark, 147
 Cogdell, 263
 Connell, 23, 24
 Contreras, 120, 132, 321
 Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro, 9
 Cortinas, 122
 Covington, ii
 Coy, 236, 247, 254, 267, 278, 279, 343, 372
 Crockett, 203
 Cruz, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 42, 44, 55, 59, 87, 92, 104, 120, 122, 131, 132, 134, 138, 145, 171, 209, 230, 291, 305, 321, 323, 324, 343
 Cuellar, 66, 262
 Cuentas, 312, 350
 Cuevas, 43, 47, 72, 81, 86, 93, 103, 114, 120, 122, 132, 143, 197, 198, 199, 219, 223, 236, 280, 285, 331, 333, 335, 339, 343
 Danaher, 117
 Davila, 350
 Dávila, xi, 63, 289, 318
 Davis, viii, 19, 154, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 349
 de Grijalva, 9
 de la Paz, 92
 De La Rosa, 248
 de La Salle, 10
 De León, 120
 de Vermudes, 120
 de Zumárraga, 10
 Degollado, 172
 Del Río, 120
 DeLeón, 132, 134, 216, 217, 259
 Delgado, 273
 Derrida, 4
 Díaz, 82, 91, 268
 Diego, ix, 10, 240, 241, 264, 275, 279, 280
 Diesen, 101, 102
 Dieson, 130
 Dillon, 220
 Dokupil, vii, 150, 151, 152, 154, 157, 158, 170, 349
 Domínguez, 320
 Donley, 90, 270
 Drago, 350
 Driscoll, viii, 210, 211, 212, 213, 226, 227, 348
 Dunn, 103
 DuPlissey, 252, 351
 Durán, 45, 259, 344
 Dwan, 31
 Ebeling, 300
 Elmer, x, 228, 253, 276, 350, 368
 Enríquez, 323, 370, 382
 Escobar, 64, 198
 Escobedo, 134, 321
 Esparza, 81, 159
 Espinoza, 43, 45, 143
 Esquivel, 26, 53, 55, 58, 59, 62, 63, 65, 85, 90, 102
 Estrada, 24, 27, 43, 54, 81, 93, 132, 138, 145, 182
 Euresti, 79, 116, 117, 130, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 297, 299, 300, 301, 303, 304, 308, 311, 325, 327, 349, 365
 Evans, 79, 116, 125
 Fahlund, 312, 351
 Falcón, 258
 Farge, 158
 Faro, 132
 Faz, 120, 132, 145
 Felán, 21, 24, 53, 166, 246, 247, 321, 323, 343
 Fernandez, 288, 294
 Fernández, 132, 136, 137, 138, 140, 216, 293, 310, 327
 Figueroa, 50, 60, 95, 132, 166, 250
 Finch, 323
 Flaubert, 1
 Flores, 17, 132, 149, 184, 193, 263, 321, 323, 375
 Ford, 22
 Fox, 92

- Fraga, 204
Francis, ix, 30, 31, 140, 224, 249
Freedman, ii
Freitag, 132
Gallegos, 321, 323
Galván, 122, 159, 268
Gámez, 77, 94, 112, 344
García, 257
García, ix, ii, iii, 5, 7, 10, 45, 46, 62, 64, 71, 73, 75, 80, 82, 86, 90, 97, 182, 188, 197, 201, 212, 213, 218, 219, 220, 221, 223, 226, 229, 235, 237, 239, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 253, 267, 281, 286, 313, 314, 321, 323, 325, 326, 330, 341, 343, 344, 350, 351, 383
García González, 10
Garner, ix, 99, 210, 211, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 241, 242, 243, 244, 246, 344, 348, 350
Garza, 120, 122, 132, 319
Gavino, 110, 216, 288, 293, 294, 310, 327
Gil, 120, 122, 126, 132, 134
Giles, 323
Godínez, 269, 310, 314, 344
Godoy, 259
Goertz, vi, 62, 66, 82, 83, 84, 86, 95, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 116, 117, 119, 120, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 134, 136, 137, 138, 144, 145, 146, 148, 149, 150, 152, 153, 154, 156, 157, 158, 161, 162, 163, 164, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 176, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 185, 188, 189, 190, 193, 195, 212, 240, 253, 322, 344, 348
Gómez, 43, 64, 66, 74, 77, 79, 94, 120, 122, 123, 126, 131, 143, 148, 159, 181, 188, 198, 247, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 276, 286, 288, 305, 313, 314, 321, 323, 324, 337, 340, 344, 345, 350, 352, 355, 358
Gonzales, iv, 24, 27, 54, 120, 122, 130, 132, 145, 159, 171, 172, 249, 285, 333, 344
González, 80, 132, 142
Granado, 43, 63, 172, 199
Granados, 321, 323
Granger, 19, 92
Green, 36, 85, 86, 89, 90, 91, 92, 130, 348
Greene, 283
Grimaldo, 313, 321, 359
Guajardo, 224, 225
Guennequis, 31
Guerra, 86, 90
Guerrero, 86, 122, 132, 217, 299, 310, 314
Guillory, x, 248, 252, 276, 344, 351
Gutiérrez, ii, 120, 327, 328
Guttenberger, viii, 208, 349
Guzik, 190
Guzmán, 241, 273, 323, 351
Hamilton, 21, 23
Hansen, 300
Hanson, 240
Harris, 167, 195, 213, 217, 222, 224, 226, 228
Hayes, 247, 252, 350
Heathcote, 219, 350
Helminiak, ix, 234, 238, 350
Henry, 130, 248, 351
Hernandez, 167, 288, 351
Hernández, 8, 9, 80, 116, 120, 130, 131, 132, 166, 167, 177, 202, 204, 205, 215, 216, 217, 291, 313, 314, 321, 323, 343, 346, 350, 351, 379
Hernández de Córdoba, 8, 9
Herrera, 71, 120, 122, 133, 145, 177, 179, 180, 181, 185, 186, 322, 344
Hidalgo, 11, 201
Hidalgo y Costilla, 11
Himes, iii
Hornsby, 12, 13
Huerta, 300
Humphrey, 16, 17, 19, 22, 25, 31, 32, 186
Hurtado, 145
Huston, 20, 182
Huxley, 1
Ibarra, 316, 322
Jackson, 18
Jaime, 314, 323
Jaimes, 254, 308, 309, 310, 313, 314, 315, 317, 322, 323, 345, 360, 361
Jaramillo, 133
Jasso, 132, 232, 248, 273, 351
Jensen, 277, 350, 351
Johnson, 39, 40, 88, 148, 168, 192
Jones, 7, 14, 132
Jordan, 149

- Joseph, 131
 Juárez, 122, 130, 143,
 171, 205, 322, 323,
 363
 Kaufmann, 313
 Kelly, 133
 Kennedy, 91
 Kerr, 22, 27, 30, 31
 Kinder, 101
 King, ii, v, 2, 6, 10, 13,
 70, 74, 119, 129, 240,
 271
 Kreckler, 120
 Krekler, 131
 Kunczik, 45
 La Fuente, 36, 38, 44,
 45, 56, 109, 122
 La Vick, 92
 Laltrella, 243, 247, 248,
 251, 253, 349
 Lamar, 7, 14, 15, 17
 Lamme, 69
 Landín, 320, 323
 Laso de la Vega, 9
 Latrello, 367, 368
 Lawrence, 120, 133,
 253, 279
 Leal, 314, 316, 322, 323
 Lebowitz, 187
 Lechtenberg, 262
 Ledesma, 79, 102, 122,
 133
 Lee, 19, 42, 47, 134
 Leija, 120, 133, 369
 Lemmon, 28, 53
 Lewis, 92
 Limón, 22, 28, 46, 50,
 58, 59, 81, 90, 120,
 159, 322, 323, 324,
 344
 Link, 352
 Linsey, 322
 Loera, 131
 Longoria, 133
 López, 33, 36, 38, 44,
 66, 86, 98, 122, 131,
 132, 133, 134, 211,
 219, 223, 237, 239,
 247, 249, 252, 253,
 263, 273, 278, 312,
 313, 322, 323, 343,
 344, 350, 351, 375,
 376, 381, 391
 Loredo, 86, 364, 365
 Lozano, 43, 91, 93, 126,
 133, 164
 Lucey, 99
 Lugo, 143
 Luián, 376
 Luna, 26, 122, 189
 Machuca, 132
 Maciel, 52, 65
 Magdala, 2
 Maldonado, 159
 Mancías, 215
 Mar, 323, 325, 330, 352,
 375, 378
 Martinez, 38, 69
 Martínez, 29, 43, 45, 46,
 47, 62, 66, 78, 85, 86,
 90, 91, 92, 93, 97,
 104, 109, 114, 120,
 122, 126, 130, 133,
 143, 144, 153, 164,
 195, 212, 216, 218,
 232, 249, 251, 259,
 265, 273, 309, 311,
 313, 314, 323, 326,
 338, 344, 349, 367
 Maserole, 232
 Mata, 120
 Matheson, 148
 Mathias, 1, 2, xii, 262,
 263, 264, 265, 268,
 269, 274, 275, 276,
 277, 278, 279, 280,
 286, 291, 292, 293,
 296, 299, 301, 302,
 303, 305, 306, 308,
 309, 310, 311, 312,
 313, 314, 315, 317,
 319, 320, 324, 325,
 326, 327, 328, 329,
 349, 350, 351, 367
 Matocha, 101, 102, 115,
 130, 149
 Mattingly, x, iv, 246,
 253, 254, 255, 256,
 258, 259, 260, 261,
 262, 264, 265, 267,
 268, 269, 270, 271,
 272, 274, 275, 276,
 277, 278, 279, 280,
 281, 283, 308, 311,
 312, 345, 349, 353,
 365, 367
 Mauer, 277
 Maurer, 351
 Mayén, 323
 McCabe, 117, 130
 McCaffrey, 212, 213,
 221, 224, 349
 McCarthy, i, 224, 230,
 235, 242, 243, 246,
 249, 250, 261
 McDaniel, 313
 McDonald, 24, 29
 McGhee, 40
 McLeish, 174
 Meany, 184
 Medel, 130
 Medina, 16, 265, 268,
 269, 272, 273, 274,
 310, 312, 314, 350,
 351, 366, 371, 373
 Medrano, 66, 133, 278,
 350
 Meltzer, 327
 Méndez, 134, 264, 316,
 322, 323
 Mendoza, 48, 55, 56,
 60, 120, 122, 133,
 134, 138, 159, 163,
 166, 208, 213, 219,
 236, 246, 247, 248,
 249, 250, 252, 263,
 287, 334, 340, 345,
 365, 366, 384
 Metz, 55, 201, 210
 Mier, 122
 Milicia, 122, 132
 Miller, 37, 40, 69
 Mireles, 41, 42, 45, 62,
 64, 83, 120, 126, 131,
 134, 135, 164, 171,
 172, 197, 208, 211,
 214
 Mojica, 179
 Molina, 45
 Moncivais, 71

- Mondragón, 322
 Mongeau, 31
 Montelongo, 393
 Montenegro, 212, 349
 Montes, 210
 Montoya, 298, 350
 Monzón, 321
 Moore, 209
 Morales, 48, 55, 60,
 166, 246, 247, 253,
 298, 313, 322, 323,
 345, 365, 390
 Morán, 322, 324, 386
 Moreno, 25, 52, 54, 63,
 65, 68, 79, 91, 92, 96,
 107, 109, 110, 113,
 115, 116, 122, 133,
 345, 347, 351
 Morris, 97, 122, 159
 Mosqueda, 85, 86, 91,
 103, 133
 Moya, 188
 Mozqueda, 55, 138
 Mulvey, 299, 310
 Muñiz, 320
 Muñoz, 232, 324
 Murillo, 218, 224, 225,
 231, 272, 273, 351
 Murrah, 19
 Nanyes, 273
 Nash, 99, 130, 348
 Navarro, 45, 275, 280,
 285, 331, 333, 335,
 339, 343
 Nelson, 146, 148
 Nieto, 186, 385
 Niño, 42, 58, 68, 70, 78,
 79, 85, 86, 90, 94, 97,
 119, 122, 123, 133,
 198, 223
 Nobel, 111
 Núñez, 120, 122, 273
 O'Connor, v, ix, 98, 99,
 101, 130, 241, 348,
 350
 O'Reilly, 29
Obama, xi, 304, 305
 Ochoa, 272
 Odín, 18
 Ojeda, 232, 278, 350
 Olague, 314
 Olaizola, v, 94, 95, 96,
 97, 119, 130, 348
 Olguin, 120
 Olguín, 97
 Olvera, 25, 86
 Orozco, 122
 Ortega, 218, 232, 351
 Ortégón, 120
 Ortiz, 63, 138
 Pacheco, 131, 134
 Palacios, 133, 159
 Parma, 124
 Pavlicek, viii, 193, 194,
 195, 199, 201, 205,
 224, 225, 345, 349,
 350, 371
 Peña, 349
 Penzenstadler, 148
 Pérez, 22, 26, 28, 45, 46,
 50, 53, 63, 68, 69, 70,
 71, 88, 103, 108, 112,
 122, 126, 133, 145,
 159, 198, 212, 249,
 252, 312, 324, 345,
 346, 350, 381
 Perry, 90, 92, 204
 Pescina, 122, 133
 Peters, iii, 328
 Petersen, 350
 Peterson, 35
 Pilatus, 1
 Pillow, 53
 Piña, 50, 60, 95, 166,
 249, 250, 322, 324,
 325, 337, 345
 Pineda, 120, 143, 159
 Piñeda, 122, 233
 Piscina, 146
 Plaisance, 324, 374
 Polk, 18
 Ponce, 80, 110, 264,
 272, 284, 352
 Pope Francis, iv
 Porfirio, 81
 Portillo, 50, 54, 87, 108,
 159, 166, 236, 246,
 247, 248, 263, 279,
 322, 324, 345
 Prado, 29
 Priest, 35
 Prieto, 30, 68, 70, 72
 Pulido, 81, 120, 122,
 133, 134, 138, 145
 Quintero, 86, 133
 Quiroz, 47, 59, 159,
 176, 181, 182, 184
 Ramírez, 41, 49, 54, 55,
 58, 64, 81, 86, 91, 96,
 102, 103, 109, 120,
 122, 128, 130, 131,
 133, 134, 138, 143,
 163, 173, 177, 179,
 183, 185, 186, 201,
 211, 218, 219, 220,
 233, 241, 305, 313,
 322, 324, 344, 345,
 366, 371, 381
 Ramos, 122, 171
 Rangel, iv, 120, 259,
 314, 324
 Rather, 82, 176, 182
 Ream, 249, 322
 Reavis, 181
 Rebollar, 321
 Regalado, 71, 133
 Reicher, 73, 86, 99, 100,
 101, 102, 105, 106,
 107, 111, 113, 114,
 119, 120, 125, 129,
 130, 137, 149, 151,
 157, 166, 167, 180,
 183, 192, 193, 194,
 195, 197
 Rendon, 215
 Rendón, 36, 44, 46, 51,
 52, 54, 85, 202, 203,
 211, 214, 216, 223,
 298, 345
 Rentería, 53, 65, 197,
 202, 203, 204, 208,
 209, 215, 216
 Requejo, 313, 322, 324
 Reséndez, 69, 70, 71, 74
 Reséndiz, 171, 279
 Reyes, 81, 86, 120, 122,
 134, 192, 193, 217,
 218, 219, 220, 221,
 235, 241, 248, 313,

- 314, 316, 322, 324,
 348, 349, 351, 368
 Reyna, 92, 250
 Rezas, 90
 Richardson, 35, 209
 Rico, 322, 324
 Riojas, 62, 145
 Ríos, 299
 Rivas, 122, 131, 146
 Rivera, 45, 71, 86, 88,
 91, 160, 278, 279,
 294, 298, 313, 324,
 346
 Roberts, 54
 Robledo, 322, 324
 Robles, 159
 Rodela, 116
 Rodgers, 120
 Rodríguez, 95, 120,
 122, 123, 131, 133,
 145, 167, 194, 198,
 213, 219, 252, 269,
 310, 313, 314, 322,
 324, 346, 350, 352,
 369, 385
 Rojas, 324
 Rojel, 321
 Rooney, 283
 Roosevelt, 55
 Rosales, 159, 322
 Ruedas, 322, 324
 Ruiz, viii, ix, 51, 59, 81,
 120, 123, 134, 143,
 159, 166, 177, 178,
 180, 181, 182, 183,
 184, 185, 186, 187,
 192, 195, 198, 202,
 205, 206, 207, 209,
 222, 223, 224, 227,
 228, 234, 318, 346,
 348, 349, 368
 Salas, 313, 324
 Salazar, 268, 269, 273,
 290, 291, 324, 335,
 341, 346
 Saldaña, 300, 301
 Salinas, 53, 59, 133,
 163, 166, 324, 346
 Sánchez, 49, 54, 64, 90,
 133, 134, 138, 145,
 167, 169, 213, 273,
 313, 314, 322, 324,
 344, 345, 346, 351
 Santamaría, 324, 380
 Santos, 88, 120
 Saucedo, 72, 86, 103,
 109, 116, 197, 198,
 223
 Sconci, 81
 Segovia, 25
 Seguín, 203
 Serrano, 69, 71, 79, 83,
 86, 102, 123, 131,
 133, 249, 257, 276,
 288, 293, 294, 346
 Shanks, 187
 Sheehan, 18, 27
 Sifuentes, 68, 71
 Sis, ix, ii, 239, 327, 346,
 350
 Smith, 13, 35, 176, 177,
 178, 179, 180, 181,
 182, 183, 185
 Snowden, 132
 Socorro, 197, 201, 212,
 213, 214, 218, 221,
 232, 244
 Soliz, 159
 Soriano, 56
 Spellman, 137
 Stefanoni, 265, 273,
 274, 352
 Stockton, 35
 Strieder, 212, 349
 Susaita, 123
 Sustaita, 120, 169, 171
 Tadeo, 349
 Tanguma, 107, 108,
 110, 134, 171
 Tapia, 257, 264, 265,
 272, 273, 351, 352
 Tarnes, 117
 Tellez, 138
 Téllez, 45, 46, 48, 50,
 63, 68, 69, 71, 88
 Terán, 71, 86, 116, 120,
 123, 133, 169, 171,
 249
 Tibbet, 259
 Titus, 148
 Torres, 55, 69, 89, 103,
 110, 123, 130, 131,
 133, 134, 136, 138,
 163, 171, 175, 300,
 301, 322, 324, 346
 Tovar, 288
 Trebtoske, vii, 77, 136,
 147, 149, 150, 151,
 152, 153, 154, 155,
 156, 157, 158, 159,
 160, 161, 170, 172,
 346, 349
 Tremain, 100
 Tretter, 21, 24, 32, 33,
 34, 39, 49, 50, 57,
 209
 Treviño, 36, 123, 132,
 133, 143, 188, 293,
 298, 301
 Truant, 126
 Trujeque, 279
 Trujillo, 86, 120, 133
 Tyler, 18
 Uballe, 120
 Underwood, 137, 146
 Uriegas, 86, 120, 122,
 126, 132
 Vadillo, 379
 Valadez, ii, 248
 Valdez, 59, 166, 314,
 322, 324, 346
 Valenzuela, ii, 96, 103,
 109
 Vallejo, 103, 108, 112,
 120, 122, 126, 145,
 198, 249, 252, 278,
 279, 345
 Van Buren, 18
 Vargas, 133
 Vásquez, ii, 71, 120,
 131, 133, 134, 143,
 145, 249, 322, 324,
 327, 338
 Vázquez, 269
 Vega, 120
 Vela, 123
 Velásquez, 59, 120, 122,
 123, 160, 169, 171,
 186, 249, 250, 259,

- 314, 322, 324, 346,
381
- Velazquez**, 371
- Venegas, 317, 322, 324,
330, 346
- Vera, 71, 83, 87, 104,
120, 131, 143, 145,
320
- Verastique, 122, 131,
171
- Verdugo, 322
- Villafuerte, 263, 298,
322, 324, 346
- Villanueva, viii, 42, 47,
48, 62, 117, 176, 182,
193, 194, 195, 197,
198, 199, 200, 205,
310, 314, 322, 341,
346, 348, 349, 352,
373
- Villarreal, 66, 81
- Villaseñor, 138, 166,
184
- Villegas, 123, 133, 134,
159
- Villereal, 120
- Wallace, 35
- Waller, 14, 15, 16, 23,
25, 27, 38, 90
- Waterhouse, 213, 219,
236, 247, 248, 250,
287, 334, 340, 345
- Webb, 232
- Weber, 11, 131
- Welch, 143
- Williams, 166
- Woll, 17
- Yáñez, 316, 322, 324
- Ybarbo, 120, 123, 133
- Ybarra, 133
- Yehosef, 1, 2, 4
- Yonikus, 147, 148, 152,
154, 155, 156, 157,
158, 189, 206
- Zamarripa, 25, 49, 52,
54, 58, 60, 63, 65, 66,
79, 81, 86, 123, 172
- Zamora, ii, 320
- Zanella, 352
- Zapata, 259, 388
- Zaragoza, 31, 55, 56,
57, 90
- Zavala, 55, 57, 64, 65,
201, 307, 347, 378
- Zercaro, 148
- Zinni, 166
- Znotas, 117, 184, 194
- Zuñiga, 316