

A Brief History of St. Therese Parish

Canton, Texas

The first efforts to establish a Catholic presence in Van Zandt County took place on August 6, 1979 when a small group of Catholics met at Canton City Hall to consider starting a mission parish in the county. Those in attendance were Danny Travis, Sybil Clements, Opal Bingham, Phyllis Medley, Nancy Blakeborough, Sarah Medley, Helen Howell, Doris Nabonne, Anne Marie Collier, and Shirley McMahan. Fr. Joseph Milam, the pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Tyler, met with the group again on August 13, and the group met again on October 14 in the home of Mr. & Mrs. George Medley.

These initial meetings were a beginning, but there was not sufficient support to continue the efforts at that time. In fact, some of the local priests in neighboring communities discouraged establishing a mission parish in Canton. Only Msgr. Glogoyske of St Anne Parish in Kaufman actively supported the notion. In 1980 Bishop Thomas Tschoepe, Diocese of Dallas, appointed Msgr. James Tucek, (formerly pastor of St. Patrick Parish in Dallas) as pastor of St. Edward Parish in Athens. Prior to this time, St. Edward Parish had been a mission of Immaculate Conception Parish in Tyler.

Bishop Tschoepe asked Msgr. Tucek to explore the creation of a mission parish in the Canton area. Shirley McMahan placed a notice in the Canton Herald announcing a meeting at Service Cafe in Canton for those interested in establishing a Catholic Church in Canton. Msgr. Tucek met September 15, 1980 with thirty families at the Service Cafe, and the group made plans for regular Sunday Mass and children's religious instruction in Canton.

Shortly thereafter Msgr. Tucek celebrated Mass in the home of Bill and Dottie Adamski, along with about 15 people. This was possibly the first Mass ever celebrated in Van Zandt County (at least in modern times). By September 30, Sally Medley began organizing children's religious education classes, and Bill Adamski began the search for a suitable facility for Sunday Mass. Russell Eubanks of Eubanks Funeral Home graciously offered the Eubank Chapel for Sunday Mass. Msgr. Tucek celebrated the first regular Sunday Mass in the Eubank Chapel on October 5, 1980. About 30 people were in attendance. Mr. Eubanks refused to accept any monetary compensation for use of the Chapel, much to the delight of this first Catholic community in Canton.

Msgr. Tucek accounted for a good deal of publicity about the formation of the mission parish in Canton. In addition to his duties as pastor of St. Edward in Athens and the St. Jude Mission in Gun Barrel City, he wrote a regular column for the Texas Catholic, the official newspaper of the Dallas Diocese. Accordingly, people began to hear about the growth of the Church in Canton.

The Catholic Church was also growing in Athens, and Msgr. Tucek needed a permanent residence there. He spent many nights at the Spanish Trace Inn. The people at St. Edward parish began construction on a rectory for Msgr. Tucek, and nine parishioners from the Canton mission responded to the call for volunteer labor. These were Bill Adamski, Bill Adamski, Jr., Hollie Brunson, George Kress, Paul Orf, Dutzie Nabonne, Jessica Nabonne, Joey Nabonne, and Ben Orf.

On July 12, 1981, parishioners voted to name the mission St. Therese. On August 24, 1981, Bishop Tschoepe designated the Van Zandt County Mission church to be under the patronage of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. The Bishop assigned St. Therese Mission to the care of St. Edward Parish in Athens. During this time the men and women of St. Therese organized a Ladies Circle and the men's Holy Name Society. Both organizations worked diligently and promoted the spiritual and economic well being of the St. Therese Mission community. A major priority was raising funds for purchase of a permanent site and construction of a church building.

The site selection committee considered several existing buildings, but finally decided to buy land and to construct a multi-purpose building, until a proper church building could be built. Bill and Dottie Adamski appealed to their friends, Charles and Dorothy Branton, who owned a farm just outside the west city limits of Canton on FM 859, between Hy 64 and 1-20. The Diocese required a minimum of two acres of land, and the Brantons agreed to sell St. Therese Mission two acres with 141 feet of frontage on FM 859. The sale was completed on January 6, 1982.