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Loyola's 75 Years of Faith

HoLY PeopLe, Holy Ground

St. Ignatius Lovola Parish in Denver

parish is people! People who gather

to worship God and to witness to

their faith. As the people of St.

Ignatius Loyola Parish in Denver celebrated

the 75th anniversary of the dedication of

their church, they wanted to focus, not so

much on the building, but on the faith of the

people who had built and sustained the

parish during all of its years. They chose the

theme, 75 years of faith!

A History of Social Justice

and Miracles

The history of the parish can be traced to

the small group of Jesuits from the Province

of Naples, Italy, who came to Colorado in

1871 at the invitation of Bishop Joseph

Machebeuf. They took charge of parishes in

Conejos, Pueblo, and Trinidad. In 1879 one

of these Jesuits, Father John Baptiste Guida

founded Sacred Heart Parish in Denver

which was later to become the mother church

of St. Ignatius Loyola Parish

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by Father

thomas C Jost

Overlowing crowds at the flourishing

Sacred Heart Parish led to the establishment

of Loyola Chapel in 1909 and then to the

building of the beautiful, monumental

Gothic building that was completed and dedi-

icated on 12 October 1924, seventy-five years

ago. By that time, Colorado was no longer a

remote mission of the Jesuits from Naples. In

1919, it became part of Missouri Province.

A key element in the history of the parish

is the extraordinary role it played in bringing

about racial integration in the Denver diocese

By the end of World War II, many African

Americans were moving into the area just

west of Loyola Church. Jesuit Father William

Markoe, working at both Sacred Heart and

Loyola, insisted that African Americans

should not be segregated, but should be

allowed to attend the church of their choice,

and that they should be allowed to attend

Loyola if that was closer to where they lived.

He also insisted that African American chil-

dren should be allowed to attend school at

Loyola. This was not the common view of

church leaders at the time.

Celebrates its 75th Anniversary

The work of William Markoe and his Jesuit brother, Father John Markoe, was strongly opposed for years, and several times they were ordered not to work with African Americans. But both Jesuits remained faithful to the higher call that they heard from the Lord, and continued to work for racial integration and social justice.

William Markoe laid the groundwork for the efforts of Father Edward Murphy to keep Loyola and this neighborhood integrated. In 1965 Murphy received two significant national awards. The Reward of Merit was conferred on him by the George Washington Carver Memorial Institute, Washington, DC, for "outstanding contributions to the betterment of race relations and human welfare." Later he was named Man of the Year" by the National Negro Voters Educational Council for notable efforts in the field of race relations.

Through the efforts of many, St. Ignatius Loyola remains a truly integrated parish reflecting the core belief of Jesus' teaching that we are all sisters and brothers in the one family of God.

Archbishop Chaput
delivers the homily

Loyola Parish has also been the site of several wonderful spiritual events. On 8 January 1951, Murphy wrote the Jesuit provincial to tell him that a young member of the parish, Mary Ellen Keenan, had received the stigmata, the wounds of the crucified Lord, on both her wrists and that he himself had witnessed this along with many other people. He also mentioned that she was gifted many times with ecstatic prayer.

It is also part of parish history that Thomas Kelly, the father of Father Thomas Kelly, was completely cured from cancer through the intercession of St. Therese of Lisieux. For many years the rose that he found at his feet on the day of this cure was on display at Loyola.

A commemorative twelve-page booklet prepared for the parish anniversary recounts these events as well as a more detailed history of the Jesuits in Colorado and the parish.

The booklet also includes lists of all the Jesuits and Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati who have served in the parish. The sisters have served as teachers at the parish school

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from its beginning. They still work in the parish and serve the Denver area as a whole. The Dominican Sisters of Hope have also been living and working in the parish for more than seventy-five years.

Three Days of Celebration

The 75th anniversary celebration began on Friday, October 8, and continued through Sunday, October 10. The focus of this event was on the faith of the people of the parish through the years. After a Vesper service on Friday night, people gathered on the parking lot for a barbecue and for a festival of ethnic music and dance. The groups that performed reflected some of the cultures that are a part of this faith community: Irish step dancers, African drummers, Hopi Indian dancers, and Hispanic mariachis. With the help of a grant from the Denver Foundation, the parish was able to invite the neighborhood to join them for this opening celebration.

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Potluck suppers have been a strong element in building a sense of community at Loyola.

Potluck suppers have been a strong element in building a sense of community at Loyola, and Saturday night's Eucharist was followed by an exceptionally abundant meal. It was a true feast where everyone brought one of their prized dishes. A beautiful slide show produced by Father Tom Rochford focused on our seventy-five years of history and on the many people who have lived their faith here. Images of those who were known and loved, and of much older ones known only by reputation, touched many of those present. This was a wonderful opportunity for the sharing of memories and stories.

The celebration climaxed on Sunday morning as several hundred members of the parish gathered on the front steps of the church for a parish portrait. Everyone then went inside the church to celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving. As is traditional in African villages, the commentator began by asking permission to speak from the elders of the parish, those seventy-five years of age or older. The commentator then led the community in the preparation and blessing of the church. Moving to the rhythm of African drums, parishioners brought in the coverings for the altar, the sacred vessels to be used in the celebration, relics of the true cross and of St. Ignatius Loyola, and plants and flowers to decorate the sacred space. Then dancers in traditional African robes carried in baskets of burning incense, blessing this holy ground where God is present among his people. After this, the entrance procession began as the community sang the spiritual "Plenty Good Room. Most Reverend Charles Chaput, OFM Cap., archbishop of Denver, presided and gave an inspiring homily. The church pianist, Jennifer Fairweather, composed the beautiful and spirited music for the parts of the Mass. After Mass the community continued the celebration with a festive brunch in Brady Hall. Archbishop Chaput stayed for almost an hour, going from table to table to greet everyone. This three-day celebration was an appropriate way to remember and honor the faith of those who had built this beautiful, monumental church and had kept the parish alive through the Great Depression, World War II, and the struggles for racial integration in the 1950s and 1960s.

Preparing for the Future

But the people of Loyola Church are not only looking to the past. Grateful for the legacy that they have received, they wish to undertake the first major renovation and restoration of the church interior. The roof and the exterior of the church have been repaired with the help of gifts and matching grants from the Colorado Historical Society. This parish of only 350 households is about to begin the first Father Thomas C. Jost capital fund drive in its history. It will attempt to raise about \$700,000 to provide handicapped access to the church and Brady Hall; to replace the original wiring and improve the lighting in the church; and, while preserving the beautiful altars of Carrara marble, to adapt the space to encourage greater participation in

the Eucharist. The architect's designs show the original marble altar becoming a reredos, the altar platform being extended into the body of the church, and a new marble altar to be situated at the point where the nave and transept cross. A baptismal pool, with flowing water, will be located inside the main doors of the church, allowing for the option of baptism by immersion.

Four of the six confessionals will be turned into shrine alcoves, and the two remaining confessionals will be enlarged to serve as chapels of reconciliation. Parent alcoves (cry rooms) and handicapped-accessible rest rooms will also be added at the east end of the church.

The parish recognizes that maintenance and upkeep on a building this old are essential and that, with the increasing number of elderly in the community, handicapped access is important. It also knows that the place where we worship God is holy ground, sacred space. The physical appearance of the building can lift our spirits and inspire us to pray and to rejoice in God's presence. The design and placement of the altar, the baptismal font, and the reconciliation chapels teach us basic lessons about living as disciples of Jesus. While we adapt our material resources suitably for our bodies, we must also use them to nourish and strengthen our spirits.

Just as the working-class people of seventy-five years ago relied on their faith when they started this parish and built this church, so the community that worships and witnesses at Loyola today is also relying on its faith. Today that faith means a willingness to sacrifice to ensure that this parish will continue to grow, will continue to be a holy people worshipping and witnessing to their faith in the Lord Jesus within and beyond his church.

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