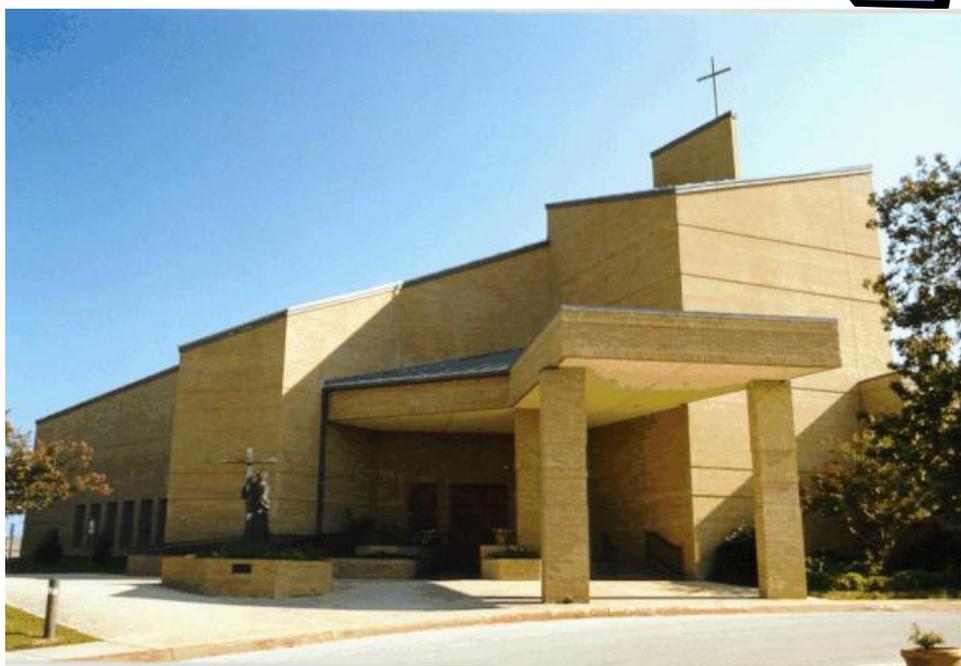


From the Popcorn Days...



An Informal History  
St. Helena's Parish  
1974-2001

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*This booklet began as an idea. The idea was to recall the unique beginnings of St. Helena's Parish. How many churches start out in a movie theatre? What are the special joys and challenges for a community rich in enthusiasm but lacking in material wealth? Were there any parallels between the beginnings of St. Helena's and the beginnings of Christianity 2000 years ago?*

*As we began to ask these questions many wonderful people came forward to share their stories. We are still People Helping People! We had a wonderful time munching popcorn, sipping soda and reliving the 'good old days.' The first draft of this booklet was titled "St. Helena's – The Popcorn Days".*

*Special thanks to the founding families for sharing their memories of the Popcorn Days.*

*Fay Jackson, a founding parishioner who has earned her Master's in Divinity saved us many hours of research by loaning us her paper "St. Helena's—San Antonio's Centennial Parish 1974 – 1994." Fay, we are most grateful.*

*And many thanks to our shepherds: Father Sean Garrett, founding pastor; Msgr. Wil Krieger, auxiliary since 1981; and Msgr. Leo Dolan who became pastor in 1988. These men have shaped our community with their love and leadership.*

*Msgr. Dolan not only encouraged us in the "Popcorn Days" project, but also reminded us that much has happened since the end of the Popcorn Days in 1977.*

*And so, like our community, this booklet grew and changed. It is now titled "From the Popcorn Days...". It is an informal history of St. Helena's Parish from 1974 to 2001, and it contains information on the Millennial Cross.*

*Every effort has been made to thank anyone who helped with this project. However, if your name should have been included but was not, please accept our thanks and apologies, and know that the oversight was unintentional.*

**THE BOOKLET COMMITTEE**  
*Merium Malik Suzan Roy Jean Deliganis*

**A GATHERING TO REMEMBER JESUS**  
*(It might have been like this!)*

**A** little more than 25 years had passed since Jesus was crucified. But the Church, conceived on the Cross of Calvary and born on Pentecost, lived on.

One evening a group of believers gathered to remember the “good old days.”

“We didn’t have a temple or a synagogue.”

“But remember the smell of the sea and the sound of the waves as he preached.”

“I was just a kid,” said a young man. “But I knew this Jesus could handle anything when he threw the money changers out of the temple and took on the Pharisees.”

The group laughed.

“He could speak his mind,” a woman agreed. “But remember how he hugged the children and told them stories. Mine are all grown up, but they still remember Him.”

“He loved everyone, even Samaritans!”

“He taught us to pray!”

“He taught us to help people.”

“We became a community of People Helping People.”

“From the beginning it was OUR CHURCH. He showed us the way. Then he left and trusted us to carry on.”

That evening the early Christians remembered the happy times and the sad times. They shared food and drink and told stories into the night.

**A**nd two millennia later, the Church conceived on Calvary's Cross lived on.

On September 14, 1974, at the direction of Archbishop Francis J. Furey, St. Helena's Parish was established in northeast San Antonio. Father Sean Garrett was named pastor.

"I was vacationing in Ireland," said Father Garrett, "when Father Tom Flanagan (now Bishop Flanagan) – a member of the personnel board – called me. He asked if I would be pastor of the new St. Helena's Parish being formed in northeast San Antonio. I said 'yes' immediately. Then I wondered, "What do I know about starting a new parish?" It was a big job. There were MEETINGS! MEETINGS! MEETINGS! But the best part was empowering the people to do God's work."

There was no St. Helena's Church building or rectory when the parish began.

"Father John Flynn, Pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Selma was very helpful," said Father Garrett. "He gave me a home for a time. Then he suggested that I talk to Raymond Friesenhahn about the donation of land for the church."

Raymond Friesenhahn grew up on the land that became St. Helena's Church.

"I hunted doves and picked sugar melons on that land, and sometimes the postman got stuck on O'Connor Road," he laughed. "We'd get the tractor and pull him out."

Raymond and his wife Frances have always helped others. "It's how we were taught," said Frances. "If someone needed something, we helped."

When Father Garrett told Raymond and Frances that the new St. Helena's Church was in need of land, the Friesenhahns didn't hesitate. They gave Father Garrett his choice of their 100 acres of land, which ran between Nacogdoches and Stahl Roads. He chose a beautiful hilltop location -- 5.64 acres -- which overlooks Nacogdoches Road." That gift of land was a great blessing," said Father Garrett. "We were able to start out without a debt on the property."

To serve as a rectory, a home was purchased in a nearby subdivision. The rectory garage was converted into a chapel for daily Mass and VERY CROWDED Holyday Masses.

“We were really packed in there,” said Don Malik, one of the first Eucharistic Ministers. “Giving Communion was quite a challenge.”



There were about 400 families in the new St. Helena’s Parish. However, there was no place for Sunday Mass, until the owners of Perrin Plaza Family Theatre made their facility available at no cost on Sunday mornings. The offer was quickly accepted, and for almost three years St. Helena’s parishioners celebrated Mass under the “big screen.”

In her paper “St. Helena’s—San Antonio’s Centennial Parish 1974 – 1994, Fay Jackson, MDiv. and parishioner, notes another unique feature about the founding of the *church on the hill*. She writes, “St. Helena’s Parish was founded in 1974, the Centennial Year of the Archdiocese of San Antonio. No other parishes were founded in the Archdiocese that year. St. Helena’s is the **CENTENNIAL PARISH** of the Archdiocese.”

## A GATHERING TO REMEMBER THE POPCORN DAYS

**A** little more than 25 years later -- in February of 2001 -- some of the early Christians of St. Helena's Parish gathered to remember the beginnings of their community. Popcorn and sodas were served.



### WHAT WAS IT LIKE GOING TO MASS IN A MOVIE THEATRE?

There was one universal memory!  
"The smell of popcorn!" said several people.  
Angie Garcia's story was typical.  
"To be ready for the matinee, theatre employees always started popping the corn during Mass. Even though they were in the lobby and we were in the theatre, the smell of popping corn was everywhere. As soon as our three year old smelled the popcorn he wanted some. And he let us know! IN A VERY LOUD VOICE! We always ended up taking him out before Mass was over.

"We were not allowed to buy the popcorn as we left. So we always went home with a screaming child and a taste for popcorn in our mouths."

\* \* \*

"We always checked for gum on our seats," said Dorothy Orsak. Her husband Jerry nodded.

\* \* \*

"I swept up the popcorn before Mass," said Elizabeth Lyle. "And I wondered if my children would understand a church with real pews."

\* \* \*

"Once we were asked to try to finish Mass early," said Ralph Yzaguirre." They were showing a remake of *King-Kong*."

\* \* \*

"Alamo Music Company loaned us an organ," said Gloria Clamp. "It stood in the front corner of the theatre. Each Sunday we rolled it out. Bruce Jarstefer played the organ and led the singing."

\* \* \*

“I was a ‘cradle Catholic,’” said Josie Tippet, “but for a while I went to the Methodist Church with a friend. Their services were also in the Perrin Family Theatre. While St. Helena’s had Mass on one side of the theatre the Methodist congregation met for services on the other side. I usually babysat with the kids in the lobby.”

Later Josie became an active member of St. Helena’s Parish. Today she’s known as the “hospitality lady” for the RCIA program.



## WHEN DID STRONG LAY INVOLVEMENT BEGIN AT ST. HELENA?

“Father Garrett always believed in lay involvement,” said Phil Jackson, a member of the first Parish Advisory Council.

From the beginning lay people served as Lectors, Eucharistic Ministers and Altar Servers.

“I was the first lector at the first Mass,” said Timothy Horan. “I felt good about continuing to spread the word of God.”

As soon as Church law allowed, women were invited to participate in all of the liturgical ministries.

“We were allowed to do more than just clean the altar,” said Kathleen Blackburn, who had served as a lector, Eucharistic Minister and office volunteer for almost 25 years.

“*People Helping People* went further than just liturgical service,” said Irene Nunley. “Father Garrett was concerned about human needs as well. And he did his part. One of the first things he did was to set up a St. Vincent de Paul Society to help people in financial need.”

“And when there was a funeral,” she continued, “Father made sure the church provided a meal for the family. He would call and say, ‘Irene, you get the meat and bread and bring me the bill. I’ll call some of the ladies to bring side dishes.’”

“Father Garrett became ill when the parish was still new,” said Ralph Yzaguirre, president of one of the first Parish Advisory Councils. “He went home to Ireland to recover. He was away for several months. During that time lay people had added responsibilities. The Archdiocese assigned priests to say our Sunday Masses, but the Parish Council made the day to day decisions.”



## HOW DID PROSPECTIVE PARISHIONERS FIND OUT ABOUT THE NEW PARISH?

“Father Garrett came to my door one day,” said Beverly Cole. “He said, ‘I’m looking for Catholics. Are you one?’”

“I said, ‘Yes.’ Then he told me about the church in the movie theatre.”

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Selma and St. Pius X Church in San Antonio were the parent churches for the new St. Helena’s. Announcements about the new parish were made in these churches, and people were invited to be a part of the new community.

“We were invited to a meeting with Father Garrett,” said Philip Jackson. “Many of the people at that meeting became members of the first Parish Advisory Council and the Finance Committee. At that time the Pastoral Council, which today meets monthly and makes many decisions, was known as the Parish Advisory Council. We were not set up to make decisions, only to advise the pastor. However, Father Garrett took our advice very seriously. And as Ralph said, when Father was very ill, some decisions were made out of necessity.”



## HOW DID OUR PARISH GET ITS NAME?

In 1974 shortly after the decision was made to establish a new parish in Northeast San Antonio, future parishioners received material (from someone) inviting them to help name the parish.

Dozens of names were submitted. It seemed everyone had a favorite saint. Many people wanted to use one of Mary’s titles for the new parish. However, not one of those names would be selected.

Bishop Francis J. Furey had just been named Archbishop of San Antonio. His home parish had been St. Helena’s Parish in Philadelphia. He decided that the first parish he established in San Antonio would be called St. Helena’s.

St. Helena’s Church in Philadelphia was pleased with the honor. On their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a parish St. Helena’s - Philadelphia sent five thousand dollars to the new St. Helena’s - San Antonio. That gift provided altar linens, vestments and many other things that the new parish needed.

Who sent out the material inviting parishioners to help name the parish? Who knows?



## WHY DID LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS CLOSE DOWN THE FIRST ST. HELENA'S FESTIVAL?

“Our first festival was held at McArthur Park, ” said Ralph Yzaguirre. “We didn’t know that games of chance with money prizes and live pony rides were not allowed in a county park. We had both. But then county deputies showed up. They informed us of the violations and closed us down.”

Several people remembered other festivals.

“We got together to make arts and crafts,” said Irene Nunley.

“And Chrismons for Christmas decorations,” said Elizabeth Lyle. “We made hundreds.”





## WHAT MADE FATHER GARRETT AS ANGRY AS JESUS WHEN HE THREW THE MONEY CHANGERS OUT OF THE TEMPLE?

“The parish had adopted a Vietnamese family -- the Phouvahns,” said Willie Phillips. “In the beginning it was agreed that we would all do our part in helping them get started. It was a big job! The family had no car. They needed transportation every day. Mr. Phouvanh needed transportation to work. Mrs. Phouvahn needed to go shopping, and the children needed to get to school. At some point the system of parishioners helping with the transportation broke down. People were not doing what they had volunteered to do. That really made Father Garrett angry,” she said. “He LET US KNOW IT! FROM THE PULPIT! But I guess it was justified anger, because the parish ‘shaped up’ and the Phouvans were eventually able to make it on their own. I believe that their children even graduated from college.”

“And I learned something from Mrs. Phouvanh,” Willie remembered. “How to make money go a long way at the grocery store!”



## HOW DID RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BEGIN AT ST. HELENA

During 1975 St. Helena’s children attended religious education classes at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Selma. In the summer of 1975 Sister Margaret Conneely CCVI became the first Director of Religious Education. After that classes were held in the homes of parishioners. There were 450 students and 50 teachers.

“Everyone helped,” said Joan Silva, religious education teacher and mother of eight. “People volunteered to teach or to open their homes for the classes. Some even offered to drive carpools. People really did help one another!”

“The year my son was to be confirmed,” Joan continued, “there was no class for him, because there was no teacher. So, even though I didn’t have a lot of teaching experience, I volunteered to teach. Those were busy days! Between changing diapers and feeding the kids I studied the lesson. Fortunately the class was in someone else’s home. Still, I had to get my eight kids fed and settled at home before I left for class.”

**Special thanks** to the following people for sharing their memories of the Popcorn Days. FOUNDING FAMILIES include: Kathleen Blackburn, Beverly Cole, Gloria Clamp, Hank Dorantes, Christine Fey, Angie Garcia, Col. Timothy Horan, Philip Jackson, Maria Jennings, Elizabeth Lyle, Don Malik, Dan & Diana Mallum, Adel Mata, John & Katy Michalski. Irene & Bob Nunley, Jerry & Dorothy Orsak, Willie Phiillps, Marcello & Leonard Sauter, Joan Silva, Josie Tippet, Laura & Ralph Yzaguirre, Adolph and Mary Helen Cervantes, Felicitas and Richard Ramirez.

## THE END OF THE POPCORN DAYS

The St. Helena's Popcorn Days officially ended on July 31, 1977, when Archbishop Francis J. Furey dedicated the first St. Helena's church building. Lay people took major roles in the planning of the Dedication Mass. Choir director Bruce Jarstefer wrote the music for the Mass and directed the choir. Diana Mallum, a parishioner and accomplished dance teacher, organized and trained a liturgical dance choir to praise the Lord with grace and movement. Many other parishioners, from altar servers to ushers, were involved in the Dedication Mass.





The first St. Helena's Church was an octagonal shaped, multi-purpose building. This building is now known as the Leo M. Dolan Center – a place for religious education and social activities. From 1977 to 1985 it was also used for Mass. A folding wooden door closed off the tabernacle area during social events. Stackable chairs were used for Mass.

"These chairs, which are still in use, have holes drilled in the back legs," said Ralph Yzaguirre. "Some people wanted to be able to kneel during Mass. So, to accommodate these parishioners about 50 detachable kneelers were purchased. The kneelers were attached to the first two rows of chairs. It was easier to have holes drilled in all of the chairs and attach the kneelers when needed, than to separate the 'kneeling chairs' from the 'sitting chairs' each time they were stacked."

\* \* \*

"I don't know how many times we stacked and unstacked those chairs," said Mary Kaye Malik, a member of the first St. Helena's Youth Group. "If we had a weekend dance or social event, the room had to be set up for Mass before we left that night. That was the rule!"

By 1977 the parish had grown from 400 to 600 families.

## JUAN CORONA

As of mid-2001 the St. Helena's employee with the longest tenure was Juan Corona. He was hired as part-time maintenance man/custodian when the multi-purpose building opened in 1977. In 1985 when the new buildings opened Juan became a full time employee.

"Things have really changed since 1985," said Juan. "At that time Mr. Friesenhahn was still running his cattle next door. If there was a break in the fence we would find his cattle wandering around the church grounds. I guess the grass looked better over here. Sometimes I helped get them back home."

Besides cattle herding and keeping the buildings clean and in good repair Juan has counted among his duties killing rattlesnakes and watching out for jack rabbits.

"The ladies in the office always called me if they saw a snake. Once I killed a big rattler at the door. And rabbits were everywhere. If you came up here at night there were all sorts of shiny-eyed critters. Of course now because of all the people, the animals are gone."

## THE SHEPHERDS

Again quoting Fay Jackson, "The direction a parish takes depends on the mesh between the pastor's interests and leadership and the interest and commitment of the parishioners."

Since 1974 the people of St. Helena's have been blessed by the leadership, love and interest of three dedicated priests.

Founding Pastor Father Sean Garrett, a native of County Cork, Ireland, took great joy in empowering people. He thought of this new community as family and led the way from 1974 to 1987. During this time the Multipurpose Building was built as well as St. Helena's Sanctuary and office building. Archbishop Patrick F. Flores dedicated the new sanctuary and office building on June 5, 1985.



Father Garrett had a great interest in art. He believed that good art could touch the emotions and raise the heart and mind to God. Because of his interest and that of the building committee, the late Sister Mary Peter Tremonte, O.P., well-known artist and sculptor, was engaged to enhance the new church with her work. Today, even though Sister Mary Peter has completed her journey on earth, her work lives on to touch our emotions and raise our hearts and minds to God.

Perhaps the most striking example of Sister Mary Peter's work is a seven foot bronze sculpture, which stands on a gentle rise just outside the church doors. In it St. Helena is depicted in her old age embracing the cross, which rises two feet above her head. Her head is lifted and her stance shows strength. There is a purse at her side showing her charity and almsgiving.

In commenting on the sculpture Sister Mary Peter said, "People of every age – young, middle or elderly -- can take St. Helena for an example. She was enriched by her life of wisdom and love, and she shows us how to embrace the crosses sent to us by God."

Sister Mary Peter's work also includes the Baptismal pool/holy water font located just inside the doors of the church, and the Reredos Wall Sculpture behind the altar, which may suggest a broken cross with grace and glory emanating from its center or the sorrow of brokenness. Because it is an abstract design the viewer is invited to interpret its meaning.

Sister Mary Peter also did the stained glass windows throughout the building. The windows in the church represent the "Caring Ministry of Jesus." They are:

1. The Samaritan woman at the well
2. The lame man at the pool at Bethesda
3. Bartimaeus, the blind beggar
4. Jesus the Savior
5. Woman with the alabaster jar of ointment
6. Daughter of Jairus, the synagogue official
7. Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector

The Chapel window depicts Mary, the Mother of the Church. The abstract design done in stained glass in the Reconciliation Room (pictured below) is called "From Brokenness to Wholeness." It represents our struggle to become whole in Christ.



## **'FATHER WIL' ADOPTS ST. HELENA'S**



In 1981 when the parish had grown to include 800 families, a call came into the office of St. Helena's Church. The caller said, "Hello, my name is Wil Krieger. I'm new in the parish and I'd like to register. And, by the way, I'm a priest – a retired military chaplain." (He never mentioned that he was a Monsignor and a retired Colonel in the Air Force.) "Please tell the pastor to call me if I can help out in the parish." It didn't take the pastor, Father Sean Garrett, long to call on 'Fr. Wil'. He has been the auxiliary priest and special friend to this community ever since. He is a native of St. Louis and has been a priest for more than 50 years. He has served St. Helena's Parish for more than twenty years.

Father Wil has special memories of filling in for Father Garrett during the Christmas of 1985. "Sean said that it had been many years since he had spent Christmas with his family," remembered Father Wil. "So I suggested that he go home and let me take the Christmas Masses that year. In no time he agreed."

"That was a memorable Christmas for me in several ways," Father Wil continued. "That year the people of St. Helena's were my family for Christmas. I came to know them better. Also in early January while Sean was still away, the Archdiocese canceled weekend Masses because of SNOW." (San Antonio had a 13-inch snowfall – the largest snowstorm in the history of this area.)

"And I relearned some old lessons!" Father Wil smiled and shook his head.

“I have always believed that it’s a mistake to judge by appearances. I’ve tried to live this belief and teach it to others. But sometimes in spite of what we know and believe, we do the opposite.”

“I was locking up the church after Christmas Eve Confessions when a man approached me. There was no one else around. The stranger was wearing faded jeans. His shirt was a bit ‘worse for wear.’ I remember thinking, ‘Poor fellow! Probably needs some help for his family at Christmas.’”

“But the man smiled a big smile and stuck out his hand. ‘Hi, Father!’ he said. ‘Please excuse my appearance.’ He slapped at the dirt on his jeans. ‘I was working around the house when I realized I hadn’t gotten this to the church. Could you please get it deposited before the end of the year?’”

“He handed me a check. It was made out to the church, for a very large amount. The man said that his business had done well, and he wanted to share his good fortune with the church.

At first I was skeptical. I wondered if I was being ‘conned.’ But it was all on the up and up. The check didn’t bounce. It was a tremendous blessing to St. Helena’s.”

“Once again I told myself, *‘We are meant to trust one another. And never judge by appearances!’*”

Since 1981 Father Wil has been the Pastor’s *right hand man*. He has been available for Mass, Confession, counseling and funerals. “I don’t know why, but there always seem to be more funerals when the pastor is away,” said Father Wil. “One year there were at least three deaths during the pastor’s four week vacation. I began to dread a call from the office.”

Father Wil is a long time supporter of the parish library. He has contributed many books and audio-video materials. In his honor the library has been named the Msgr. Wilfred L. Krieger Library. It is a media resource center open to all parishioners.

Father Wil’s interest and skill in the field of audio-visuals has provided the parish with many interesting and informative homilies. His slides of the Holy Land have become a regular part of Good Friday liturgies.

## FATHER DOLAN—SPELUNKER AT HEART?

By 1987 Father Leo Dolan, a native of County Tyrone, Ireland, was assigned to replace Father Garrett as pastor of St. Helena's Parish. Father Dolan had served five parishes in this Archdiocese since coming to San Antonio in June of 1960.

It was in the 1950's that young Leo Dolan decided to live out his vocation in Texas. He was studying for the priesthood in St. Patrick's Seminary in Carlow, Ireland, when he heard the late Archbishop Robert Lucey invite Irish seminarians to serve in the San Antonio area.

"Even as a kid, I wanted to come to Texas," said Father Dolan. "Not to see cowboys and Indians," he laughed, "but to visit the caves near San Antonio. I thought exploring them and discovering the treasure that's hidden beneath the earth would be very exciting."

Father Dolan hasn't had much time for cave exploration since coming to San Antonio. However, he has discovered that prayer is like a hidden treasure. "Prayer is at the heart of our relationship with God," he said. "Without prayer nothing good happens."

Good liturgy is the most visible form of prayer at St. Helena's. Each weekend Eucharistic ministers, lectors, ushers, music ministers and altar servers join with the people in the pews and the clergy to celebrate Mass.

"It's the joy of my heart to see so many people involved in the prayer of the church," said Father Dolan. "We have hundreds of liturgical ministers. And we have the Liturgy Committee and the Environment Committee to put it all together. These people serve week after week. I call them our 'long distance runners.'"

\* \* \*



A well-loved long distance runner came forward in 1997. Phil Alm, a member of the choir, had heard much discussion about problems with the church organ. He agreed to head up a committee to look into the purchase of a new one.

As noted earlier, the first St. Helena's organ was

borrowed from Alamo Music Company and used in the movie theatre during Sunday Masses. Later when the parish moved into the multi-purpose building, a used organ was purchased. That organ was still in use in the late 90's when Phil agreed to chair the Organ Search Committee.

"That old organ had all kinds of problems," said Judy Alm, Phil's wife and also a member of the choir. "But the new one – a real dream of an organ—was priced at \$84,000."

The parish had just gone through an expansion project. Raising that kind of money seemed impossible! "To everyone but Phil!" Judy laughed.

Phil, a retired Army Colonel who had served in the Gulf War, knew the impossible, and this was not it. He set about the task with organization and determination. In less than a year, enough money had been raised to purchase not only the dream organ with its special pipes, but a grand piano and a new sound system for the church. Parishioners were invited to a concert showing off the new musical instruments in early November of 1998.



On November 14, 1998, Phil Alm died suddenly in an automobile accident. However, he had lived to see the new organ installed in the church. And today the beautiful music, which enriches the parish liturgies, is a fitting tribute to the man who knew what was not impossible!

"Father Leo loves to teach the *Angel of God Prayer* to the children," said Suzan Roy, Director of Religious Education. "That prayer seems to speak to him about God's love and concern for us. He wants to share that with the children."

Father Dolan has always encouraged the teaching of basic Catholic prayers. "You can't beat the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary* and the *Credo* for staying in touch with God," he said. "We will be saying those on our death beds."



Installed as "Monsignor", Father Leo accepts congratulations from founding member and Chairman of the Finance Council, Ralph Yzaguirre.

One of Father Leo's favorite forms of prayer is Eucharistic Adoration. In the early 90's, with encouragement from the Pastor, Charlie and Rose McClure set up a team to plan for Eucharistic Adoration. "We began on Fridays during Lent," said Rose McClure. "Soon it was Fridays year around. Now people can visit the chapel for Adoration from 9 am to 9 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays."

Father Dolan is also known for his welcoming spirit. Jean and Tom Deliganis remember their first meeting with him.

"A few years ago we moved," said Jean Deliganis.

"We thought St. Helena's was our new parish. So on the day that we moved, we decided to drive by St. Helena's to check the times of Masses. When we drove into the empty parking lot around four that Saturday afternoon, we saw a priest standing in front of the church. Although I was looking less than very 'presentable' after a day of moving in hot, humid weather, I got out of the car to talk to the priest. I hardly had stepped out of the car, when Fr. Dolan walked towards me, introduced himself and came to the car to meet my husband, Tom. We told him we were in the process of moving, and where our new home was located. Then we asked if St. Helena's would be our parish. He thought for a moment and then said, 'Well, I think you really belong to that parish down the street--- BUT YOU COME HERE!' What welcoming words! We have been at St. Helena's ever since and have been so thankful to Fr. Dolan---he was and is a Good Shepherd who welcomes his flock!!!"

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

With prayer and a welcoming spirit at the heart of the community, much growth has taken place since 1974. The St. Helena's Religious Education Program, headed by Sister Margaret Conneely, CCVI in 1975, began with 50 teachers and 450 students. Classes were held in the homes for students kinder through twelfth grades.

Nancy Schaffer the next Director of Religious Education introduced more activities for teens and worked with Elsa Dodd to form a teen youth group. Elsa, a native of Ireland, had a great devotion to the Holy Spirit. She encouraged the young people to call their group the Cenacle, after the

Upper Room where the Apostles received the Holy Spirit. She said, “I pray that these darlin’ young people go out into the world filled with the Spirit of God.”

Elsa and her family moved away from San Antonio when St. Helena’s was still a young parish. But she is remembered for her influence on young people; her jolly, loving spirit, and for her trademark painting of “The Hands of Jesus Breaking the Bread.” This painting still hangs in the homes of many parishioners.

In 1981 Ellie Krupa replaced Nancy Schafer as DRE. The number of students and teachers in the program continued to grow. Preschool classes, teacher training, and some adult classes were added. Ellie also worked out a plan for holding classes in the Multipurpose Building.

By 1987 when Cynthia Schaffer began as DRE, the new St. Helena’s sanctuary and office building had been completed, and the Multipurpose Building remodeled for more classroom space. However, because the population in northeast San Antonio had grown rapidly, the parish now numbered 1200 families. Because classroom space was still scarce, classes were taught Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays.

When Suzan Roy became DRE in 1994 the parish population had reached 1800 families. Plans were underway to add four new classrooms for Religious Education. These classrooms could be used individually or opened up to provide one large meeting space. Suzan and Assistant DRE Joan Martinez have provided new opportunities for faith formation.

“Our strength,” says Suzan, “lies in how well-focused we can continue to stay around our goal of taking every opportunity community provides to better know, love and serve God and neighbor and remembering that God is in control and we are all in this together.”

In 1997 Rose Marden joined the staff as Pastoral Associate. Her duties include but are not limited to training Liturgical Ministers and coordinating the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. In the last three years St. Helena’s RCIA program has grown into one of the largest in the Archdiocese.



Summer program, *Grow in Love*, is a joint effort of children, teens and adults.

## **GROWTH – NOW AND IN THE FUTURE**

Part of the expansion project, which began in 1994, was made possible by another gift from Raymond and Frances Friesenhahn. In 1990 they donated an additional 15 acres of land to St. Helena's. Most of the land is being saved for the future. "It will be a perfect site for any future building," said Father Dolan.

However, because young people are the builders of the future, some of the land was used immediately to develop a CYO athletic complex.

## **THE CATHOLIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION BEGINS AT ST. HELENA'S**



When CYO began at St. Helena's in 1990 about 80 youngsters signed up to play baseball and softball. Four adults ran the program.

"In 2001 we have more than 300 young people and their families involved in our sports program," said Denise Elizondo, Registrar for the program. Denise and her husband Oscar are on the San Antonio CYO Zone Board. Oscar Elizondo is President of St. Helena's CYO. "Presently at St. Helena's we play basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, track and volleyball. Our most popular sport is basketball."

At least 100 adult volunteers make the program possible, according to Elizondo. "We have Coaches, Team Moms and many other volunteers," she said. "CYO takes a lot of time and energy, but we love it. We love it because we love being involved with our kids."

## **REACHING OUT**

Besides the Athletic Complex the 1994 expansion project also provided four new classrooms, increased storage space and a new road giving the parish access to Nacogdoches Road at Dreamland.

"Once again we are most grateful to Raymond and Frances

Friesenhahn,” said Father Dolan. “They made the new road possible by donating an additional 2.57 acres of land and funding its construction.” “In their honor,” Father Dolan said, “this road, which makes our church easier to find, was named Friesenhahn Court.”

## THE MILLENNIAL CROSS



The history of St. Helena’s Parish began with a remembrance of Jesus and his death on the cross. In closing, we return to the foot of the cross.

A Celtic cross (seen above still under construction) known as the Millennial Cross and dedicated on the Feast of Christ the King 2001 now stands in the circle on Friesenhahn Court. This

dramatic symbol of the faith was funded by Raymond and Frances Friesenhahn. It is a tribute to their parents as well as to those bishops, priests, brothers, sisters, and lay people who left their homelands to bring the faith to Texas. The Millennial Cross also commemorates 2000 years of Christianity on earth.

The Millennial Cross is made of granite rising 77 ½ feet out of a concrete base. It is located upon one of the highest hills in San Antonio. The cross faces East in keeping with the Church’s early tradition of building its large cathedrals with the altars facing east toward Jerusalem and the resurrection. The Celtic Cross is distinguished by the cruciform or circle at the top. The circle symbolizes the one eternal God with no beginning and no end.

The Celtic or “Ringed” Cross has special meaning for St. Helena’s Parish. It is said that the Emperor Constantine looked up at the sun and saw a vision of the cross. The cross with the ring at the top became a representation of Constantine’s vision. Constantine was the son of St. Helena, who is known as the Foundress of the True Cross.

The lower panels of the Cross are made of polished Carnelian granite from South Dakota. The halo or ring at the top is made of black Academy granite from California.

The panels surrounding the base of the cross contain inscriptions and dedicatory material. The Jubilee logo designed to celebrate 2000 years of Christianity is sandblasted at two places at the base of the cross. One logo

faces the St. Helena's church buildings and one logo faces the outside world. In the logo which faces the church buildings, the words Christ, Yesterday, Today and Forever are carved in Latin. In the logo which looks out to the world, the same words are written in English. Sandblasting allows for shadings of light and dark to represent the colors of the logo. The rougher texture is lighter in color while the smoother surface is darker.

A six-sided, hexagonal shaped plaza – a place for prayer and reflection -- surrounds the base of the cross. At each of the six angles of the plaza there is a granite pillar. Embedded in these pillars is lighting which projects onto the plaza and the base of the cross. Beamed lighting from the base illuminates the cross itself. The Millennial Cross is visible for many miles especially at night.

**PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE  
NOW AND IN THE FUTURE**



“Building for the future of a parish takes more than land and brick and mortar,” said Father Dolan. “In 2001 our parish census numbered 2,669 families. That’s a lot of growth since 1974. I am sure the future holds even more growth for our community. We will continue to need more than buildings to meet the spiritual needs of so many people especially if *People Helping People* is to be more than just a slogan.” Fortunately, at St. Helena’s we have many wonderful people who are willing to share their time and talents as well as their treasure to help others.



Left to Right: Deacon Jay Williams, Fr. Wil Krieger, Irene Williams, and Fr. Bob Overman

The deaconate program has been a particular source of blessing for St. Helena’s through the years. We have been blessed most recently with the ordinations of two long-time parishioners Leonard Stancombe and Paul Gustowski. Other deacons who have served St. Helena’s Parish are Anthony De Pasquale (deceased), Jay Williams (deceased), Joseph Krupa, Michael D’Agostino,

Joseph De Leon, and Harold DeCuir.

Today people at St. Helena’s help others by sharing the monthly collection with another parish, by providing financial help to those in need through the St. Vincent de Paul Society and by contributing to a seminary bourse to educate future priests.

Organizations have developed to meet the social and spiritual needs of the community. The Knights of Columbus, the KC Ladies and the Columbian Squires sponsor many projects which benefit the parish. The Knights of Columbus Blood Drive has become a tradition providing blood to families when a health crisis occurs.

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Spiritual growth has been fostered for many years by St. Helena's Charismatic Prayer Group. ACTs retreats for men and women, faith formation groups, The Guadalupana Society, and a very active RCIA program also encourage spiritual development. The Ministry to the Sick brings Communion and comfort to those who are unable to come to Mass.

The Meditation/Memorial Garden, which is located outside the Dolan Center beneath the statue of the Risen Christ, also fosters spiritual growth. Pictured below on the day of dedication, Father's Day 1996, it is a shady nook with flowers, a fountain and a statue of St. Francis of Assisi. It invites parishioners to spend a few restful moments praying and remembering loved ones who have died.

The Prayer Garden became a reality through the hard work and dedication of Toni Mount. "It's a beautiful place to pray and remember our deceased loved ones," she said.

Before his death, Toni's husband, Paul, had helped her plan and raise funds for the garden. "At first we spoke of it as a Meditation Garden," said Toni. "But as Paul's condition worsened he began to speak of it as a place to remember."



## In Memoriam

Jubilee moments in the Judeo-Christian heritage lend themselves particularly well to recording the history of God's people. As first-hand participants of the Bi-Millennium, it was our original intent to stop to reflect on our particular leg of this long-distance journey through time and tell our story. In the process of completing this booklet, the events of September 11, 2001 intervened. Putting together this booklet in the days following the attack, we realized that the Millennial Cross had become ever more important. Lifted high, it is a symbol of God's love. It says, "Fear not! I am with you always!" As people of the cross, we are blessed to know ourselves as witnesses to this ongoing revelation of God's saving presence in the world. This is good news!

**A**nd so it is that the Parish of St. Helena, celebrating more than 25 years, continues to be a faith community of *People Helping People*. Like the early Christians who "devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers" (Acts, 2:42) so also are similar activities carried out by the present day Christians of St. Helena's Parish. The communal life at St. Helena's is manifested in many ways – welcoming others, building community, inviting parishioners to use their talents and gifts, encouraging participation in parish activities, and honoring the cultural, racial and ethnic diversity of all those in the community.

As parishioners of St. Helena's look to the future, we must reflect on our purpose – a community of people called together by God and unified by the Holy Spirit. We must remember our beginnings of not only 26 years ago but also 2000 years ago and the words of Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of me."



**Meet the Author:  
She Loves to  
Tell the Story**

At jubilee times like these, God blesses God's people with storytellers—people who know the value of story and who have a way of telling it so that God is praised.

Merium Malik is a founding member of the parish along with her husband Donald. Intimately involved with parish life from the beginning, Merium and Don have worked side by side with priests and parishioners cultivating growth in this community of faith.

Merium graduated in 1961 from Texas Tech with a degree in journalism providing her a professional background for the work she loves. Raising three children in the church, Merium began gathering a broad-lens view of parish life. Furthering this familiarity with parish life, Merium became the secretary and bulletin editor for the parish in 1981. In 1988, she resigned as parish secretary but continued to edit the bulletin as well as write for *Today's Catholic*, the Catholic newspaper for the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

In 1991, a severe episode of multiple sclerosis confined Merium to a wheelchair. However, she continued to write and teach doing in each what she loves to do best—tell stories. Perhaps you have caught glimpses of the Master Storyteller himself in the portraits she has painted of the St. Helena's family. If so, thanks be to God for the gift of faith and the gift we find that we are for each other.

***Merium Jackson Malik***  
***May 27, 1939-March 3, 2008***