

The Catholic Church of the Incarnation developed and grows under direction and spiritual guidance of six bishops, 8 pastors, 9 associate pastors. Included present here today Bishop David Talley, Msgr. Peter Buchignani, Rev. William Parham and our Associate Pastor, Rev. José Cruz Zapata – Torres.

The history of the Church of Incarnation begins in the late fall of 1978 when the Most Reverend Bishop Carroll Dozier, First Bishop of Memphis in Tennessee and Fr. Buchignani discussed whether there were sufficient families for a weekly liturgy to be held in Collierville. When the time for the change came, Fr. Buchignani planted a seed in the hearts of the Collierville people attending services at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Germantown. Under strong influence of Fr. Buchignani, 105 families left OLPH and started to attend Mass at the Collierville Funeral Home. The first liturgy was celebrated in Collierville on December 17, 1978 at 9:30 a.m.

The Collierville community started off with one Mass, but not long after, due to the size of the chapel, they needed two Masses.

In a short six months, Fr. Buchignani gave a strong spiritual foundation to the young Catholic community of Collierville, but the strong desire to have their own church and parish came for the first time to this community located on the eastern edge of Shelby county in 1979 when Fr. John Atkinson became a pastor.

Fr. Atkinson lived in a home on Burley Road and then on Hunters Retreat, and the daily Mass was celebrated there in a tiny living – dining room setting.

In January of 1981, Bishop Dozier appointed Fr. James Pugh as a new pastor and wanted him to begin building a church in Collierville.

Fr. Pugh rented a home on West Poplar, where access to the Funeral Home and other churches in Collierville was most convenient. The daily Mass was celebrated in the dining room which had been turn into a chapel.

It was not long before the needs began to multiply. The funeral home was always available on Sunday, but because of funeral services, it could not be used often during the week.

So, Saturday evening service was set up at the United Methodist Church on the town square. Parish Religious Education classes were held in the Presbyterian Church on the corner of Poplar and Peterson Lake Road each Thursday and Choir practices were held at Saint Andrew Episcopal Church on Walnut Street each Tuesday evening.

Fr. Pugh soon discovered that there would have to be a major fundraising effort if a church was to come forth. It was going to be the first Catholic Church in the town of Collierville.

On November 20, 1983 five hundred people gathered and participated in ground breaking ceremony. It was going to be the new Bishop's first such ceremony within his new Diocese.

The Most Reverend Bishop J. Stafford commended efforts of this small but strong community of believers and urged them to continue in their mission.

On March 26, 1984 the Catholic Church of the Incarnation was dedicated by Bishop Stafford with Bishop Dozier in attendance.

The Church building rose from ten acres of farmland. The facilities contained the Main Sanctuary for Sunday Mass, a Chapel for daily Mass, a Reconciliation Room, a Narthex, a Kitchen, a Fellowship Hall with connecting classrooms and a two – bedroom Rectory with Church offices attached.

After the debt was paid off under Fr. Kleiser, Fr. Kantner, and then Fr. Parham purchased more land around the church, as it became available. The new sanctuary and School was dedicated by Most Reverend Bishop J. Terry Steib, the fourth Bishop of Memphis, on January 21, 2007. It was designed and constructed during Reverend William Parham's administration.

In addition to Msgr. Peter Buchignani, Rev. John Atkinson and Rev. James Pugh, the Catholic Church of the Incarnation has been served by the following subsequent pastors: Rev. William Kleiser, Rev. William Kantner, Rev. William Parham, Rev. Ernie DeBlasio and Rev. Jacek Kowal.

Today Incarnation Parish has grown to 1,588 registered families and celebrates Masses in two languages.

We are grateful to God for many blessings that the Incarnation Catholic Church and its members received in last 40 years.

We are grateful for 1,928 Baptisms, 2,513 First Communions, 2,770 Confirmations, and 331 Marriages.

We are also grateful for 47 different ministries within the parish, the 484 children enrolled in our PRE Program, and the 283 students enrolled between our ICS School and Preschool.

As we gather today to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our parish, may God continue to bless us with His eternal and everlasting love and grace.