



Notre Dame des Victoires
San Francisco
1856-2006

Rev. Etienne L. Siffert, S.M.
May 2006

The 150th Anniversary of
Notre Dame des Victoires
San Francisco
1856-2006



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Acknowledgements

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I, again, thank Father Tony Ward, S.M., in charge of the archives of our motherhouse in Rome, who kindly allowed me to read the “Minutes of the General Council Meetings of the Society of Mary” and the files of the different Fathers who succeeded each other at Notre Dame des Victoires.

I also thank Mrs. Bernard Métais who translated into English, the French text of this history.

Today, this brochure has a new Introduction: the first two paragraphs of Chapter 1 concerning the arrival of Frenchmen in San Francisco. The material for the years 1985-2006 is also totally new.

I wish to thank Dr. Annick Foucrier, a professor at the University of Paris, for her help. She provided me with many documents, pictures, and newspaper articles that she discovered at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley and the California Historical Society in San Francisco. She sent me lists of ships bringing French people at the beginning of the Gold Rush, particularly, the 17 ships of the *Golden Ingots*, from October 1851 to January 1853, with the names of all the passengers, including their ages, professions, provinces, marital status, etcetera.

In 1999, Dr. Foucrier wrote a book entitled, *Le Rêve Californien, Migrants Français sur la Côte Pacifique, XVIIIe-XXe Siècles*, which she hopes to publish in English very soon so Americans can enjoy the history of the French, not only in San Francisco, but also in all of California.

I thank Mary Caroline Gissler who provided me with editorial assistance for the new text I prepared for these pages. I also thank Ging Lim who worked on the layout design and image preparation of this brochure.

Finally, I wish to thank the *California Historical Society* and the *The Society of California Pioneers* for providing me with several historical pictures of Notre Dame des Victoires.

Father Etienne Siffert, S.M.

Introduction

In late June 1776, Father Francisco Palou and Lieutenant Jose Moraga, accompanied by 16 Spanish soldiers, led a small party to the shores of San Francisco Bay. They selected a site to found a new mission that is now known as Mission Dolores, although it was then called San Francisco de Asis.

No other Catholic church was founded in San Francisco until 1849 when two Canadian priests, Fathers Jean Brouillet and Antoine Langlois, built a small chapel dedicated to St. Francis Xavier where Columbus Avenue and Vallejo Street intersect today. Preaching was conducted in French, Italian, Spanish, and English.

In 1851, the Irish founded their own church, dedicated to St. Patrick, on Mission Street. In 1854, another church was built at California Street and Dupont Street (now Grant Avenue) where French, English, and Spanish were included in the services. This was the first Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption and is now called Old Saint Mary's. The French community moved to Bush Street in 1856 where they bought a former Baptist Temple and gave it the name, Notre Dame des Victoires.

Whereas San Francisco's need for Spanish language ministry as the Mexican province of California since 1828 and for English language ministry with the American occupation in 1847 is evident, one might wonder why it was so important to have a French church in San Francisco since before 1848, there were only a few French people in all of California.

If the Franciscans came to bring the faith to the Indians in 1776, the French came 80 years later for another reason.

Chapter 1:

The Foundation of Notre Dame des Victoires

THE ARRIVAL OF THE FRENCH IN SAN FRANCISCO: 1849

It was the Gold Rush which brought thousands of French people to San Francisco. Before 1848, only a few of them, mostly traders, were living in California. In Los Angeles, there were some bakers, farm laborers, craftsmen, and a successful vintner, Jean-Louis Vignes, whose nephew, Pierre Sainsevain, operated a sawmill in the Santa Cruz mountains. Some men deserted whalers or other ships and worked as carpenters in different places.

San Francisco took its present name in January 1847 before California became American, but was still called Yerba Buena from *el paraje de yerba Buena* meaning: the place of the good herb. It was a small village of some 400 to 500 inhabitants, and the entire city amounted to some 60 dwellings. Only three Frenchmen were known to have lived in Yerba Buena in 1848 – one of them being a physician.

The discovery of gold on January 24, 1848 by James Marshall on the property of John Sutter drastically altered this state of affairs. As soon as the news got out, thousands of able-bodied men headed for the gold fields: the garrison at Monterey was deserted; hordes of people from North and South America flocked to the discovery site; even sailors abandoned their captains when their ships called at the port of San Francisco when it was not the captains themselves who went to the mines. In 1848, San Francisco had only 800 inhabitants, but 2,000 in February 1849; 5,000 in December 1850; 23,000 in 1851; 36,000 in 1852! Many French people who came to San Francisco did

not stay in the town, instead they went directly to the mines to fulfill their dreams of finding gold and returning home with their fortunes.

It took time for the news to reach Europe so the first Frenchmen came from Canada where they had worked as trappers and hunters; others came from Louisiana or from Chile where they had established a colony. Thus, Charles Barroilhet came from Chile with his family, and his son, Henri Barroilhet, married Louise Rabe in the French church in San Francisco in 1859.

In France, revolution broke out in February 1848. King Louis-Philippe lost his throne; the Second Republic was established. Times were hard – the country's economy was in depression. With commerce in paralysis, many men were unemployed: clerks, former police officers, soldiers, civil servants, and workers of all kinds. The news that California was "rolling in gold" struck home and tempted many to seek their fortunes abroad.

On September 14, 1849, the first 40 Frenchmen arrived in San Francisco from Le Havre aboard the first boat, *La Meuse*, soon to be followed by more vessels, some carrying as many as 300 immigrants. Usually, the journey took 6 months, and sailing around Cape Horn was sometimes an ordeal. From November 1849 to April 1851, more than 90 ships arrived in San Francisco bringing close to 2,000 French people – 90 percent of whom were men. They had to pay for their fare and the cost was high. Consequently, few artisans or laborers could afford to come. It is interesting to note that the future pastor of Notre Dame des Vic-

toires, Abbé Dominique Blaive, was the chaplain aboard *L'Arche d'Alliance*, which reached San Francisco in October 1850. He went on to Stockton where, in 1851, he founded the first Catholic church.

By 1851, companies for the transport of emigrants were created in Paris with encouragement from the government of Napoleon III who considered this an opportunity to rid the country of poor people and the unemployed. Brochures appeared singing the praises of California as a place where several days' work sufficed to amass a fortune. Lotteries with prizes of trips to San Francisco were organized. The famous lottery of the *Golden Ingots* resulted in the transport of more than 3,000 people from October 1851 to January 1853, in 17 ships.

The first ship, *Le Malouin*, left France on October 11, 1851, with 146 people, most of them between 18 and 40 years old. It arrived in San Francisco on May 15, 1852, after 7 months at sea. The second ship, *L'Alphonse-Nicolas Cézard* left France on October 23, 1851, with 167 people, aged mostly between 21 and 40 years, and arrived in San Francisco on February 28, 1852, 2-1/2 months before *Le Malouin*. The last ship, again, *L'Alphonse-Nicolas*, left on January 25, 1853, with 222 people, mostly between 10 and 40 years old, and arrived in San Francisco on May 15, 1853 – the fastest voyage of all, taking only 3-1/2 months at sea.

Though in actuality, 3,978 emigrants left France through the lottery of the *Golden Ingots*, only 3,300 reached San Francisco; many – tired from the long travel, bad food, and shipboard conflicts – stayed behind in Rio de Janeiro or Valparaiso.

The emigrants represented all professions, especially among the men: carpenters, cooks, shoemakers, masons, merchants, painters, tailors, farmers, clerks, hairdressers; and among the women: dressmakers, seamstresses, laundresses, cooks.

Sometimes, a man came by himself and his wife and children would later rejoin him. Sometimes, men were later married in San Francisco to women whom they met aboard the ship or to women who had arrived on other ships. Forty-five couples of these *Ingots* emigrants were married at Notre Dame des Victoires.

Usually, upon arriving in California, the immigrants went directly to the mining camps of the *Mother Lode*, whether to the Northern Mines above the Mokelumne River and near Sacramento or to the Sonora Mines below the Mokelumne and headquartered at Stockton. They usually spoke only French and tried to stay together in groups. Americans call them, *The Keskydees*, because when one spoke to a French miner, the Frenchman would turn to a compatriot asking, "*Qu'est-ce qu'il dit?*" ("What is he saying?").

Some of the emigrants became successful, like Charles Covillaud, who came to California in 1847 – he worked in the mines, opened a store, and later married an American woman and founded Marysville in honor of his wife, Mary. Another successful French emigrant was François Pioche, who opened a store in 1849, started a bank with his partner, Barthélemy Bayerque, bought properties, and built the first tracks for trains on Market Street. In 1853, a young passenger, 16-year-old Isidore Boudin, arrived with the last shipload of *Golden Ingots*. He was an apprentice baker and joined his parents who had arrived earlier in 1850 and founded a bakery on Dupont Street. Isidore Boudin was married at Notre Dame des Victoires in 1873. His four children were baptized in the French church and his bakery, though no longer owned by the original family and its descendants, still operates under the same name, *Boudin*.

But not every immigrant arriving from France had parents or friends already living

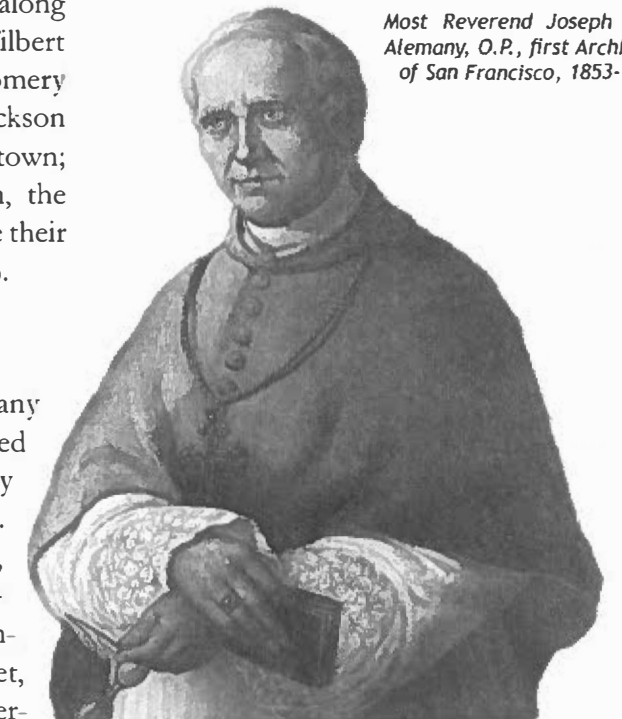
in San Francisco. Some arrived very ill after a long and arduous journey of 5 or 6 months; others who went to the mines acquired various diseases and were in need of help. Thus, in 1851, several generous men decided to start a French Benevolent Society patterned after those in France, wherein each member who paid \$1.00 a month would be cared for in his time of need, free of charge. Later, the French Benevolent Society became the French Hospital that was in operation until 1980.

In San Francisco, the French liked to stay together so they could meet, speak their own language, patronize their compatriots' businesses: banks, hardware stores, restaurants, bakeries, saloons, gambling parlors, etcetera. In 1855, the *French Quarter* was located along Dupont Street, between Pine Street and Filbert Street, along Kearny Street and Montgomery Street, and between Pine Street and Jackson Street. At that time, there was no Chinatown; but as the Chinese gradually moved in, the French moved towards Bush Street where their national church would be located in 1856.

FOUNDING THE FRENCH CHURCH: 1856

Since the onset of the Gold Rush, many Canadians – hunters and trappers engaged by the Hudson Bay Company for many years – came down to San Francisco. In fact, the Vicar General of Nesqually, Oregon, Father Jean Brouillet, was Canadian. He had been sent to San Francisco by Most Reverend Francis Blanchet, Archbishop of Oregon City, "in the interest of the Church of Oregon." No doubt, this meant that he had come to collect money from the gold miners for the Oregon missions which had never been well off, but now were even more prostrated by the exodus of Oregonians to the mines. He arrived in San Francisco in December of 1848, took up residence at Mission Dolores, collected a little

money, made some contacts, and, realizing that his compatriots had no priest to assist them with their spiritual needs, remained with them. Several months later, a Canadian Jesuit, Father Antoine Langlois, joined him. His diary informs us that an officer in the American army, Lieutenant Hardy, gave him a room where he can say Mass. He also wrote that a small chapel dedicated to St. Francis Xavier was built where the first Mass for French speakers was celebrated on June 17, 1849. It was located approximately where Columbus Avenue and Vallejo Street intersect today. The registry of 1849 confirms the French identity of the first group of faithful, but Italian, Spanish, and Irish surnames were gradually added to its lists.



Most Reverend Joseph Sadoc Alemany, O.P., first Archbishop of San Francisco, 1853-1884

At the end of 1849, Father Brouillet returned to Oregon. Most Reverend Joseph Sadoc Alemany, a Spanish Dominican and Bishop of Monterey under whose jurisdiction fell San Francisco, named Father Langlois as Pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church, and later, in 1852, made him Vicar General. An Irish priest replaced him at St. Francis Xavier and

gradually the little parish lost its French character. Joseph Alemany was named Archbishop of San Francisco on July 29, 1853, and he decided to build St. Mary's, which would be its cathedral. It was opened in 1854, and since the French found it more convenient than the older church, they chose to attend services there from that time on. Sermons were preached in English, French, Spanish, and Italian. In honor of the patron saint of San Francisco, St. Francis Xavier Parish adopted the name of St. Francis of Assisi. The coexistence of these various ethnic groups brought about some tensions that the creation of distinct ethnic parishes seemed advisable. The French were the first to have their own national church.

On November 2, 1855, Archbishop Alemany called upon Father Dominique Blaive to minister to the French community. Father Blaive was born in 1812 in Tours, France. Before entering the priesthood, he served time in the French army, attaining the rank of captain. Once ordained, he spent 3 years in Paris until the Archbishop of Paris assigned him to be chaplain onboard the *Arche d'Alliance*, a merchant ship carrying civilians under a private contract, which arrived in San Francisco on October 12, 1850. Father Blaive was officially assigned to Stockton on March 5, 1851, with the arduous task of forming a congregation and acquiring a church. He was able to buy a property at the corner of Hunter Street and Washington Street to build a rectory and a little church dedicated to St. Mary. This church is still currently active.

Father Blaive, who has been described as being "tall and handsome, looking every inch a soldier," accepted Archbishop Alemany's offer to come to San Francisco, and promised to do his best to build a French church. In the meantime, he would celebrate the liturgy and minister to the French at the Cathedral of St. Mary. Very soon he discovered that the major-

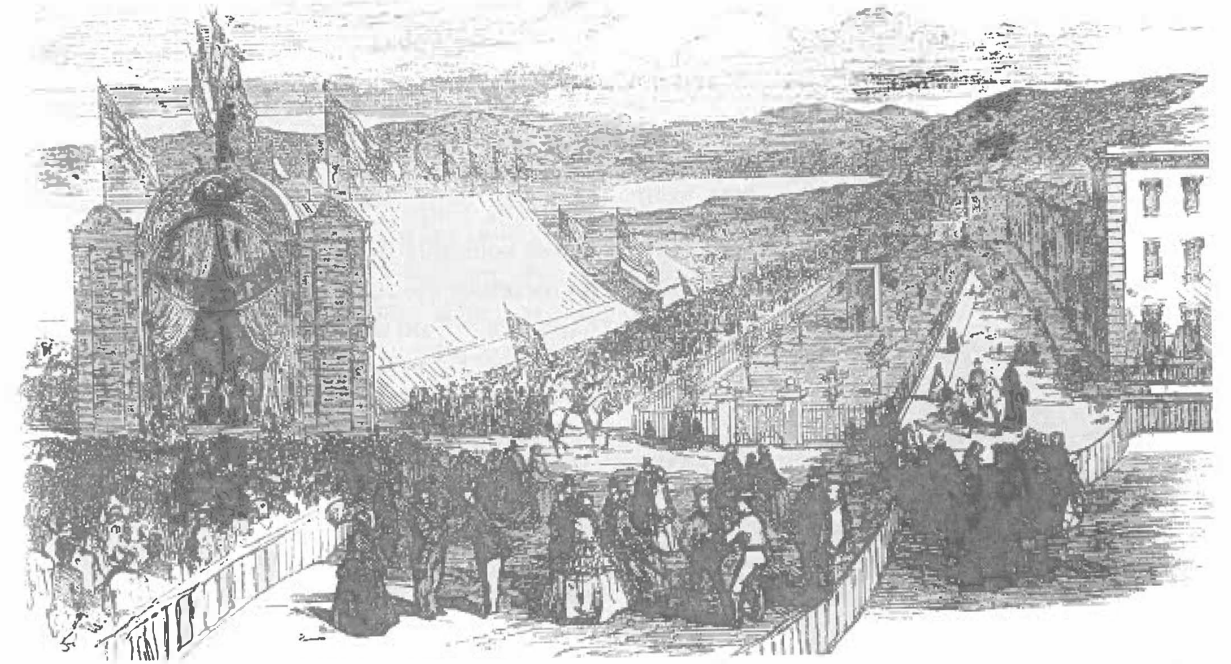
ity of his compatriots were not very religious; some were hostile, many were indifferent, and he had to create interest among them in building a church and raising the necessary funds.



Reverend Dominique Blaive, Pastor, 1856-1862

An opportunity presented itself before long. This military man-turned-priest had been following the progress of the Crimean War and, in particular, the siege of Sebastopol whose garrison had been resisting a year-long attack of the French and English armies. This port city on the Black Sea fell on September 20, 1855, and just after Father Blaive's arrival, the news reached San Francisco arousing the patriotic sentiments of the French colony. He was among those who wished to have the event commemorated appropriately, and a great celebration was planned along with the English and Italians immigrants since the three peoples were allied during the Crimean war against the Russians.

The only place that could accommodate a large crowd was South Park, built in 1854 and opened in January 1855, between Second and Third Streets. On November 26, 1855, 2,000



Artist's rendering of the celebration of the fall of Sebastopol at South Park. This engraving is from "The Illustrated London News," February 16, 1856 (from Albert Shumate's collection, "Rincon and South Park.")

representatives of France, England, and Italy marched to South Park where a spacious pavilion had been erected. Father Blaive sang a *Te Deum* in honor of the victory at Sebastopol and made a speech replete with patriotic fervor at the banquet:

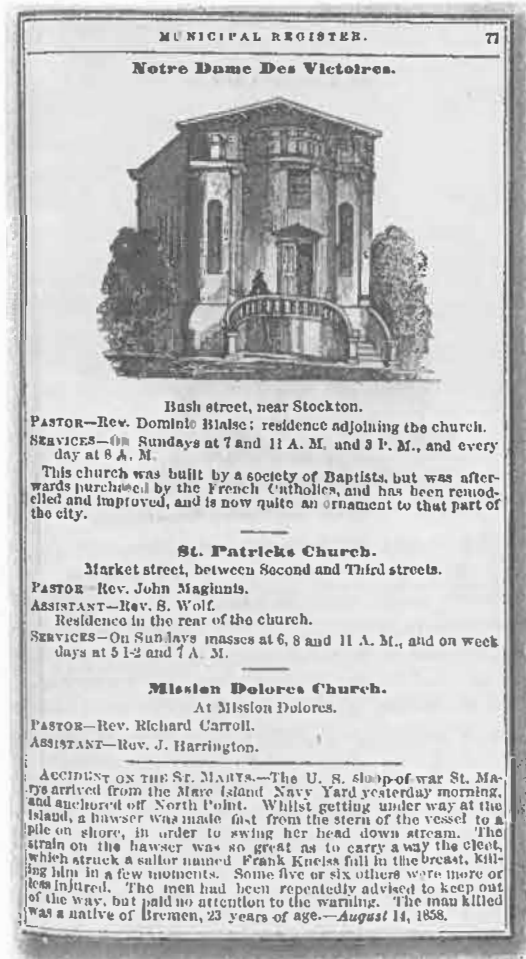
"Ladies and Gentlemen:

"Little known amongst you, and especially among the population of San Francisco, I am happy to have an opportunity to address you on an occasion when all hearts beat in unison for the same cause. We are here assembled to render our thanks to the God Almighty who alone can give victory! We are all happy at the triumph of our brother countrymen. I do not speak to you of the victories and great deeds performed by our armies before Sebastopol; the papers have given us details sufficient upon this subject, and you know them better than I do. One word, therefore, will be all I have to say: The present war has no parallel in history. It is not a war of a nation against another people; it is still less a war of religion – a war which I hope we shall never see again. Here we see Catholic France allied to Protestant England, fighting against [schismatic] Russia, to protect the Crescent. There is something in this war which is wonderful: it is to me a war of giants, between Civilization and Barbarism. Ladies and Gentlemen, the decrees of God are inscrutable – but I believe that our cause is just and holy, for Heaven has given us victory . . .

"We are all united, we love each other, we are all united by one sentiment; and that same charity unites us by the same tie to our brother struggling before Sebastopol. Honor, respect, gratitude, to those who have been wounded and mutilated by war, but we owe them something more. Let us give them a token of our sympathy by helping them in their distress – as well as the widows and orphans of those who have fallen in conquering! As to the last, it would be a great ingratitude to forget them thus. I propose that a High Mass *De Profundis* the most solemn possible shall be sung for them in the cathedral. It would be desirable to have it soon, but unfortunately His Grace the Archbishop being absent, and as I am convinced he wishes to be present, we must wait his return. Come, all ladies and gentlemen, and bring your mites for the widows and the orphans – for I know you are all charitable."

In closing, he made a strong appeal to his audience for a true French church which he proposed to place under the patronage of *Notre Dame des Victoires* in memory of the glorious feat of arms accomplished by "our" soldiers in the Crimea. His audience, for the most part not very religious, felt its patriotic fervor carried to great heights by the atmosphere of the banquet. They welcomed his words with enthusiasm and vowed to support the project

financially. But, with wine, beer, and champagne freely flowing and strangers present engaged in stealing food, the various nationalities began fighting among themselves with chaos resulting. This early attempt at international goodwill had failed.



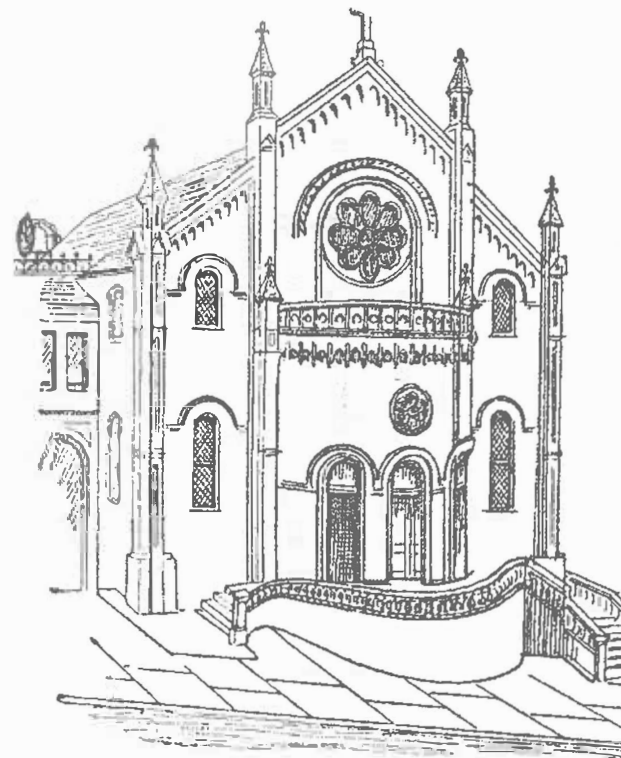
From the SF Almanac, 1859

Nevertheless, there was a Baptist Temple located at 526 Bush Street next to the heart of the French community, which was up for sale because its members had left San Francisco when the rush to the gold fields declined and many mines were abandoned. It happened that on April 9, 1856, the Bank Marziou & Cie of Paris purchased this temple because of its location in the French Quarter. Father Blaive called upon Gustave Touchard, Director of the local branch and Vice President of the Catho-

lic orphanage, and persuaded him to cede the building to the parish for \$15,000, the sum which the bank had purchased the temple.

After some interior modifications, this former Protestant place of worship became a workable Catholic church. On May 4, 1856, it was solemnly dedicated by Archbishop Alemany under the patronage of Notre Dame des Victoires. From that time on, the French colony of San Francisco had a church they can call their own. Father Blaive immediately moved from his temporary quarters at St. Mary's rectory to the basement of this church, where he continually lived in the uncomfortable dampness and closeness of the sunless substructure until his death in 1862.

In his church, Father Blaive organized the Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the first one in the Archdiocese, modeled after that of Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris, France, organized in 1836.



Artist's rendering of the new façade of NDV church in 1876

There remained the matter of the \$15,000 debt to the Bank Marziou & Cie. Pledges were made, successful fundraisings were held, ladies' guilds and committees were formed, and large sums of money were generated, but somehow, these funds were ill-managed resulting in no progress in paying off the debt by 1860. The Bank Marziou & Cie, tired of waiting, threatened to repossess the building which it still owned. Not knowing where to turn to save his church, Father Blaive went to Archbishop Alemany who, in turn, obtained a loan from the Hibernia Bank in October 1861, with which the Bank Marziou & Cie was paid.

This unfortunate pastor may not have been much of an administrator, but he was a zealous and honest man. In order to reduce expenses, he never built a proper rectory, choosing to live instead in a cold, dark, and damp room located in the basement of the church. From this he contracted and suffered inflammatory rheumatism that was aggravated by many years of hard work and the many privations he suffered as a pioneer California priest. In July 1862, Father Blaive performed his last baptism and last marriage. He died on September 30, 1862. He was 50 years old. He was buried in the “priests’ plot” in Calvary Cemetery at Lone Mountain in San Francisco. On August 4, 1939, his remains were transferred to the “priests’ plot” in Holy Cross Cemetery at Colma, California.

At the time of his death, an audit of the church's finances revealed a debt of over \$20,000. It is difficult to reconcile the priest's many years of devoted service to the church to his inability to handle his church's finances in the last years of his life. There is not a single indication anywhere of this inability while he served in Stockton and the Mother Lode. Perhaps his failing health, wracked as he must have been by rheumatic pains, may at least partially account for his financial management shortcomings.

Father Molinier was Father Blaive's successor. He had come from the Aveyron region of France and was, at that time, a missionary in Mariposa County. Archbishop Alemany had known him for a long time. He received a request from Father Molinier for incardination into the San Francisco Archdiocese in 1856. The response of Archbishop Alemany to Father Molinier, dated October 2, 1856, is the

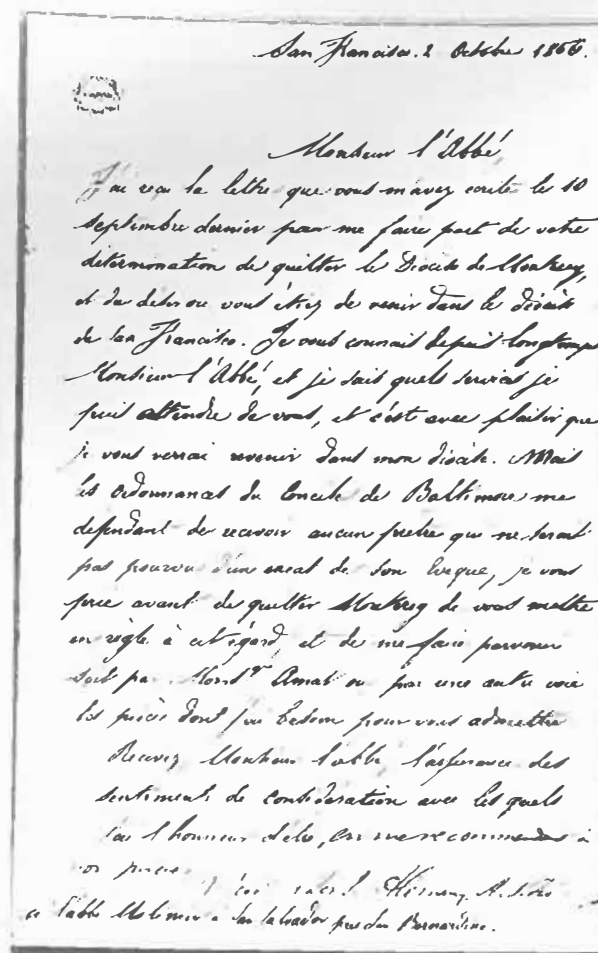


Record of the first wedding celebrated at Notre Dame des Victoires on May 22, 1856, by Fr. Dominique Blaise

earliest original document which we have today and one of the rare documents to survive the 1906 earthquake and fire. Thus, Father Molinier was transferred from the Diocese of Monterey to the Diocese of San Francisco. When he took charge of Notre Dame des Victoires Parish, he found it empty of all inventory, including the sacred vessels which had all been seized in payment of his predecessor's debts. Moreover, half of the French colony was, if not downright hostile, at least wary; the other half was discouraged. The parish now owed \$18,000.

The new pastor did not lose heart, but set right to the task at hand. Under his direction

and encouraged by his example, the faithful organized a variety of fundraising events, the fruits of which were not wasted this time. After a year, Father Molinier was able to reimburse \$6,500, one-third of the debt, including interest. Not only did he know how to motivate his parishioners, but he also had a knack for obtaining large sums of money from outside sources. In June 1864, the French government gave him 5,000 francs. That same year, the Propagation of the Faith endowed him with \$1,600 and continued to help him through-



Letter of Archbishop Alemany to Fr. Jean Molinier out the years so that by October 5, 1967, the debt was completely repaid. It is worthy to note that Father Molinier also donated \$500 of his personal funds to the church.

In the years to come, he was even able to

purchase an organ and a pulpit for the church. Exhausted by the job, he resigned at the end of October 1869, leaving \$2,000 in savings toward the acquisition of a rectory. He retired to the home of friends in Oakland in the hopes of resting and regaining his strength, but died several weeks later.

Another French priest, Father Delmas, came in November 1869. It does not appear that he was named pastor of the parish. He signed the baptismal and marriage registries for 6 months without mention of his position. Only once, on the 10th of April 1870, did he include the title, "pastor," after his name. He left and was replaced on April 12, 1870, by Father Henri de Clerq, a Belgian priest.

The new pastor was adept in business, eloquent, and enterprising. Just 11 days after his arrival, he planned a solemn High Mass for the Feast of Easter, which fell on April 23. He invited the French military companies that had been formed in San Francisco under the auspices of General Cazeneau, Commander of the California militia, and Monsieur de Cazotte, the French Consul. The Monitor of that era described that splendid ceremony where the "Sapeurs" and the Lafayette Guards paraded through the church behind Captain Perrier and Lieutenant Buffandeau to a military cadence by a drum corps.

Father de Clerq loved pomp and ceremony. On June 17, 1871, the Jubilee of Pius IX, he held a large procession which merited press coverage. The cortège, including a group of choir boys in red cassocks and white surplices, clergy, and a large number of the faithful, left the church, went down Bush Street, took Kearny Street to California Street which it followed up to St. Mary's Cathedral where the Archbishop and an attendant crowd awaited.

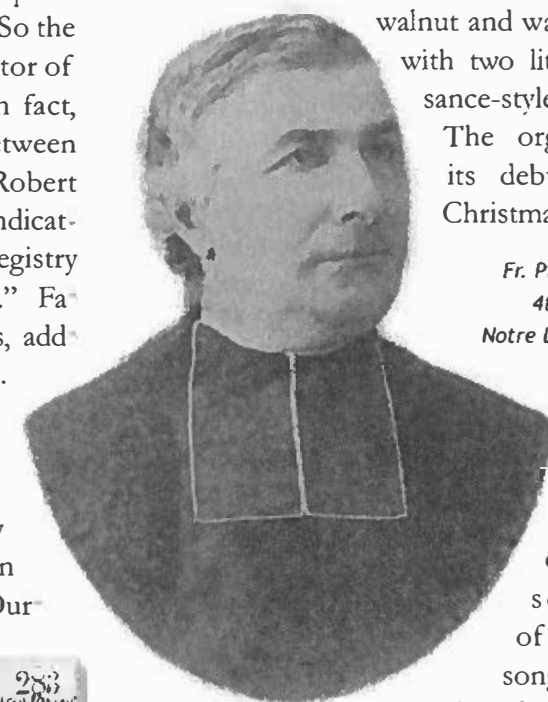
As time went on, problems arose between the pastor and the Archbishop, who requested that he leave. He was to be relieved of his

duties as pastor as of January 1, 1875 and another French priest, Father Robert was to replace him. By January 1, Father de Clerq was still there . . . and so was Father Robert. So the Archbishop simply declared himself pastor of the French parish! The Archbishop, in fact, performed several marriages there between January and April of that year. Father Robert performed several marriages himself, indicating his position after his name of the registry as, "Priest, Assistant to the Archbishop." Father de Clerq only performed baptisms, adding "Assistant Pastor" after his signature. He quietly disappeared from view after March 7, leaving no trace of his whereabouts. Twenty years later, he revisited Notre Dame des Victoires on his way back from Mexico where he had been exercising his ministry for some time. Dur-

ing the 5 years of his pastorate, he installed a twenty-register organ built by Joseph Mayer of San Francisco. The console was made of walnut and was adorned

with two little renaissance-style turrets.

The organ made its debut at the Christmas Mass of



Fr. Pierre Robert,
4th Pastor of
Notre Dame des Victoires,
1875-1885

1874 —

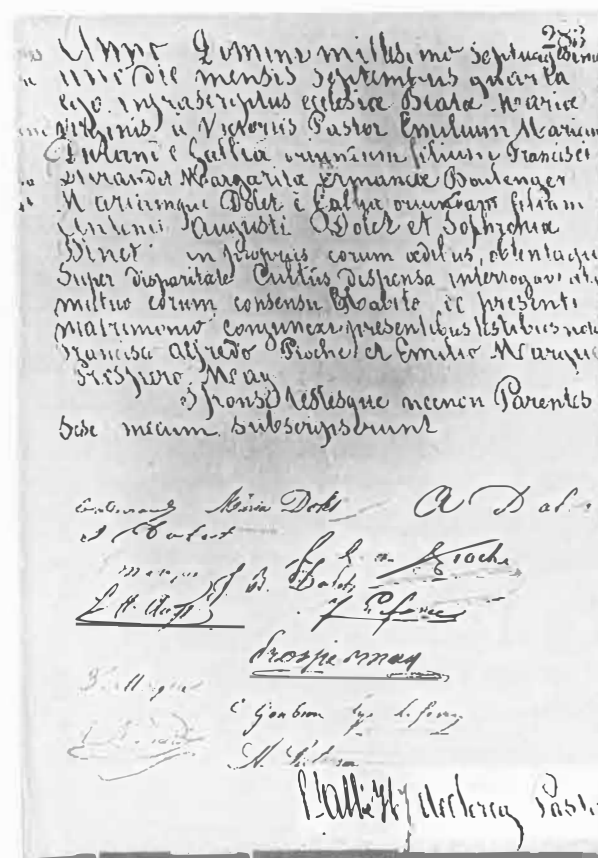
this was considered as somewhat of a "swan song" for Father de Clerq who

was then to leave in a week's

time.

Father Robert became pastor in May 1875. A native of the Hautes-Alpes, he was to stay on for 10 years, but there is very little information left about his activities. The Monitor of July 15, 1876 states that on the occasion of the Centennial of American Independence, a French warship was docked in the port of San Francisco and a solemn High Mass was celebrated the previous Sunday at Notre Dame des Victoires with Admiral Perigot present. Father Michel, chaplain of the vessel, preached the sermon evoking Bastille Day (July 14) and American Independence, in which France had played an influential role.

In order to raise some money, Father Robert had the idea of using a vacant lot that measured 10 feet wide and 90 feet long that was located alongside the church. He built a series of rooms in a row — unfortunately, he

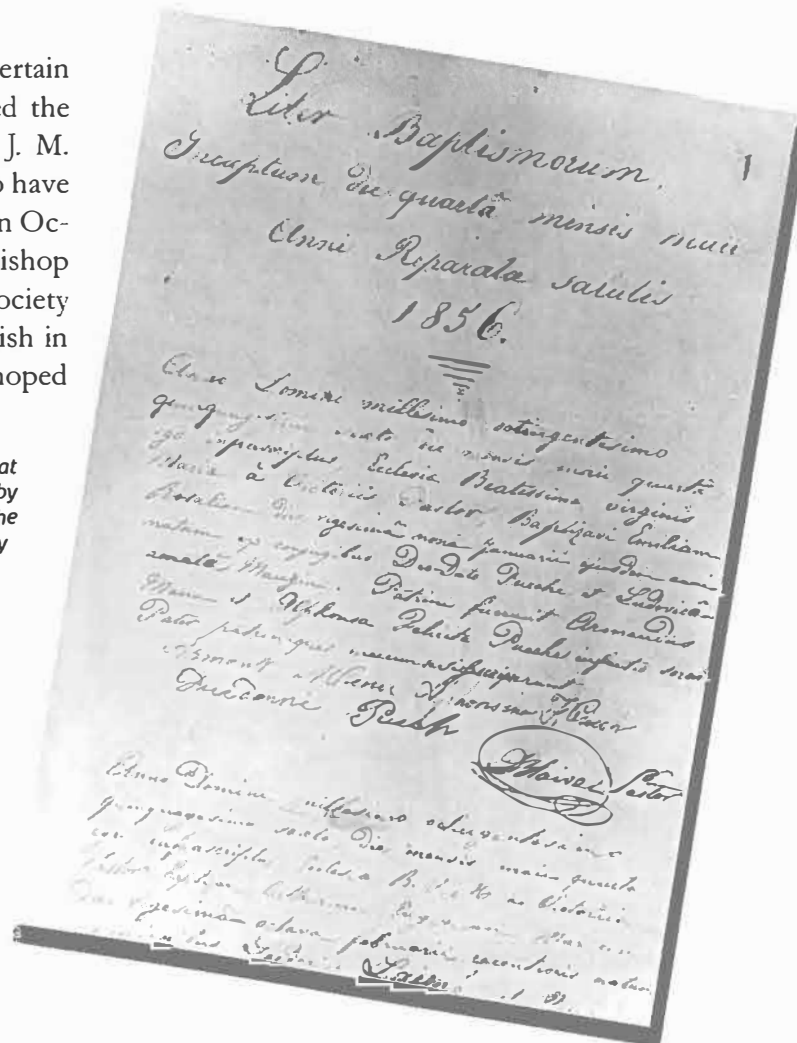


Wedding celebrated at Notre Dame des Victoires on
September 4, 1871 by Fr. Henri de Clerq

forgot to notify the Archdiocese which owned the property and which would have refused his request. Since he had built those rooms with his personal funds, he retained the rent. Nasty rumors soon spread within the French colony, accusing the priest of pocketing church funds. The local papers talked of thousands of dollars deposited in the bank. Archbishop Alemany, old and ailing, did not dare to interfere. In fact, he was about to resign, which he did on December 28, 1884, and retire to Spain, where he died 4 years later. His successor, Archbishop Patrick Riordan did not lose any time; he invited Father Robert to return to Gap, his hometown, for an indefinite period of time. The pastor left at the end of May and was later accused of having left with more than just his personal belongings.

Between June and August 1885 a certain G. Antonucci, "Rector Assistant," signed the parish registry. On August 30, Father J. M. Beaugelin succeeded him; he had liked to have become pastor, and even used that title in October. But for some time now, Archbishop Riordan had been in contact with the Society of Mary, for he wished to place the parish in the hands of a religious order. He thus hoped

Record of the first baptism celebrated at Notre Dame des Victoires on May 4, 1856 by Fr. Dominique Blaive. On that same day, the church was dedicated by Archbishop Alemany



to avoid the difficulties which diocesan priests had occasioned over the past 30 years. He thought that the Superior General might assign two or three priests, thereby reinforcing the community which would serve Notre Dame des Victoires. If one priest could not handle the job, he could easily be replaced by another and the Archbishop would not have the task of finding a successor. Thus, the Marist Fathers came to San Francisco, though they were not new to the diocese.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE MARIST FATHERS IN CALIFORNIA — MISSION SAN JOSE: 1883

The Society of Marist Fathers of Lyon was founded by Father Jean-Claude Colin and approved by Rome in 1836. Its members had founded colleges, staffed parishes, and seminaries, and left for Oceania as missionaries. At the request of the Bishop of New Orleans, the Society had, in 1864, accepted to administer Jefferson College, then the parishes of Convent and Algiers, Louisiana. For nearly 20 years, the Marists had only those three outposts, and were thus hardly known in the United States.

The Apostolic Vicar residing in New Caledonia, Bishop Ferdinand Vitte, belonged to the Society of Mary and went to France for health care in 1878. On his way to returning to his Pacific Islands, he crossed the United States, arrived in San Francisco, and while awaiting his ship bound for Noumea, he called on Archbishop Alemany. The latter, wishing to open a local seminary to train future priests rather than send them away to Baltimore or even to Ireland, asked if the Society of Mary might accept taking charge of the project. Bishop Vitte promised to intercede on his behalf before the Superior General of the Order, Father Julien Favre, S.M., and advised him to put the request in writing.

On February 29, 1880, Archbishop Alemany began a lengthy correspondence with Father Favre which we fortunately have preserved. In his first letter, he mentions how he had heard of many good things about the Society of Mary, then implanted in England, from Most Reverend Macheboeuf, Bishop of Colorado. He wrote that he is hopeful that the Marists will be able to open a seminary in California and that vocations will come from as far away as Oregon to fill it.

Father Favre shared this letter with the Marist advisory board when it met on June 1,



The Venerable Jean-Claude Colin, S.M. (1790-1875), founder of the Society of Mary

1880, and he obtained a favorable consensus: it was decided that three priests would suffice at the outset, and the Order was delighted to have San Francisco as a launching point for its missionaries headed for Oceania. The Panama Canal did not exist then, but there was a rail connection between New York and the Pacific Coast, completed in 1869. The good Fathers in Lyon imagined their Society implanting itself in San Francisco, whose population was said to be "immense." In reality, the population was under 200,000 at the time.

And so, Father Favre wrote to Archbishop Alemany that the Society of Mary accepted the responsibility of running his "major seminary," a noteworthy term for it would become the source of misunderstanding between the Archbishop and the Marists. The following year, the Order planned to send Father Regis Pestre, S.M., Doctor of Theology who had taught at

various seminaries over the past 15 years, including Holy Cross College in Dublin. Two other priests would be assigned to assist him. However, this “major seminary” was still non-existent, and the land on which it would be built was yet to be purchased. It was only in April 1881 that the Archbishop was able to acquire a parcel of land at Mission San Jose, a little town which, he stated, “has the best climate in California, and which is located only a short distance from San Francisco, though somewhat far away.” This contradictory phrase meant that – as the Fathers learned upon their arrival in California – you had to take a boat from San Francisco to Oakland, then a train to San Jose, and, finally, a coach to reach Mission San Jose. This tedious 2-hour trip annoyed Father Pestre who was used to seminaries being close to the seat of the Diocese.

Archbishop Alemany and Father Favre had agreed upon the administration of the future seminary, the rule of the house, authors to be studied, conditions for the staff, etcetera. Yet, the ground-breaking had not yet taken place. On the 26th of August 1881, the Archbishop announced to The Superior General of the Marist Order that construction would begin “right away” and, armed with this good news, he dared to ask for several additional priests to evangelize 50,000 Chinese who had come to California. Father Favre postponed looking into this “most important and difficult question” and promised to send four priests for the seminary which he hoped would be completed by September 1882.

The building, which would contain 40 bedrooms, opened its doors on January 13, 1883, and was called Saint Thomas Aquinas Seminary. Of its five students, four were actually young seminarians taking their year of Rhetoric. Imagine the disappointment of the Fathers who had been sent to Mission San Jose, especially that of the Superior, Father Pestre,

who – on June 1883 wrote that it would be impossible to continue the job. First, the Archbishop should establish a minor seminary, and when he had a sufficient number of candidates for the major seminary, he would then build one near his cathedral. Archbishop Alemany wrote back, entreating them to wait a while, that he hoped that soon there would be several dozen seminarians. He would content himself with the presence of Father Reisdorfer, S.M., a Luxemburger who had come with the small group, and with one other “sensible” priest, implying that they could recall Father Pestre. This was later explicitly requested in a letter dated, January 30, 1884.

However, in Lyon, the decision had been reached to discontinue the project. In spite of piteous supplications of Archbishop Alemany, the Marists left in June 1884 and the seminary was closed. The students dispersed to other dioceses and six of them went on to become priests. After a few years, Father Pestre went to New Zealand where he became Superior Provincial.

The Marists had only remained in Mission San Jose for 2 years. The lack of students, their youthfulness, the distance from the seat of the diocese, difficulty in meeting other priests working in California were the chief reasons for the failure of the enterprise. But at the end of 1884, Archbishop Alemany ceded his position to Archbishop Patrick Riordan who remembered the Marists who had come to Mission San Jose. He had not had the problems his predecessor experienced with them. He, therefore, called upon them to take charge of the French Parish of San Francisco.

Chapter 2:

Father Onésime Renaudier, S.M.: 1885-1892

This affable person appears on the scene and we are able to get to know him quite readily, thanks to the volumes of letters which he wrote to his superiors, his sister, Marie, and his brother, François. The latter was a priest in Paincourt, Louisiana, but was unable to enter the Society of Mary due to his poor health. But he looked up Onésime when he was assigned to America.

The Renaudiers were natives of Angers. Onésime was born in 1837, entered the Marist Order and was ordained at the age of 25. He was then assigned to the College of Montluçon in the Allier region, and in 1863, volunteered for the American missions. Shortly afterward, he was sent to Louisiana where he was an assistant priest and then pastor of several parishes. He made his mark as an able administrator and was a man of great human and spiritual qualities. He was known for his remarkable open-mindedness. Thus, the Superior General thought of him when in 1885 he received a letter from Archbishop Riordan offering the Marist Order the charge of the French parish in San Francisco.

Father Renaudier, S.M., who had in the meantime returned to France, received the order to “go and see, to stay as long as necessary to size up the situation and to write to Lyon so that a definite decision might be made.” He left Le Havre on October 10, 1885, reached New York, and went on to Boston to meet with Father Jean Leterrier, S.M., then Provincial of America. On November 3, he took the train to Chicago beginning the 8-day trip that would bring him to San Francisco on



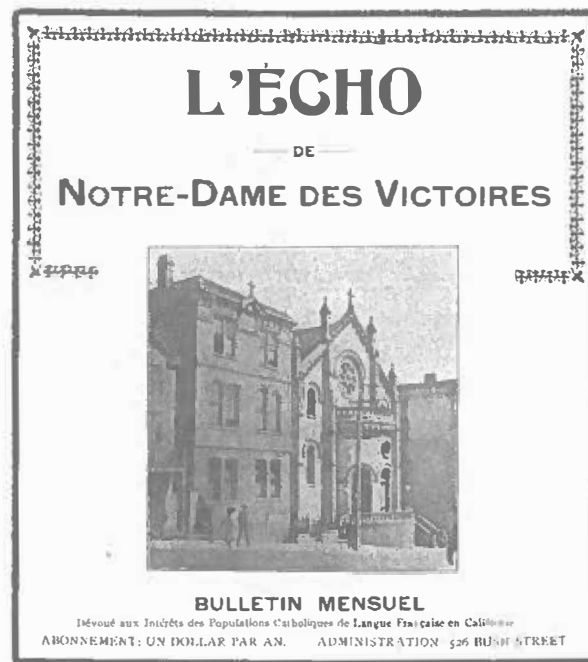
Fr. Onésime Renaudier, S.M., Pastor, 1885-1892

November 10. As soon as he arrived, he called upon the Archbishop and learned that the situation had come to a head since his departure from France.

Father Beaugelin had been serving the parish for the past 2 months. He was a dynamic person, a fine orator, and he spoke French, English, and Spanish. He enjoyed the parish. Archbishop Riordan would have let him stay on had he not offered Notre Dame des Victoires to the Marists. Father Renaudier was thus faced with the following dilemma: formally accept the parish immediately, which was contrary to this instructions, or hesitate, and have Father Beaugelin take his place – the latter having already printed stationery and calling cards with his name and with the title of Pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires! What determined Father Renaudier to take the parish was Archbishop Riordan's promise to offer other projects to the Marists, in particular, that of reopening the seminary, but in a more

convenient location than Mission San Jose. The Archbishop told him that he had just purchased a lot on which to build a new cathedral, and in leaving St. Mary's Church, he might give the Marists a part of the territory surrounding this church, poorly situated in the heart of Chinatown, two miles away from the location of the new cathedral.

It was thus that Father Renaudier accepted the parish and was installed as Pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires on Sunday, November 15. Four days later, he wrote to his Provincial to explain what he had done. The latter agreed with the decision and, in turn, wrote to his Superior General to cover his subordinate who had made the on-the-spot decision, determining that "the conditions set out by Father Martin, S.M., for definite acceptance were present . . ." A more timid priest, or one more attuned to the letter of Obedience might have



L'Echo de Notre Dame des Victoires. The official bulletin of Notre Dame des Victoires, circa 1886.

hesitated and missed the chance. We must be grateful to Father Renaudier for having had the good sense to make the appropriate decision,

one which opened a new era to the Marists in California.

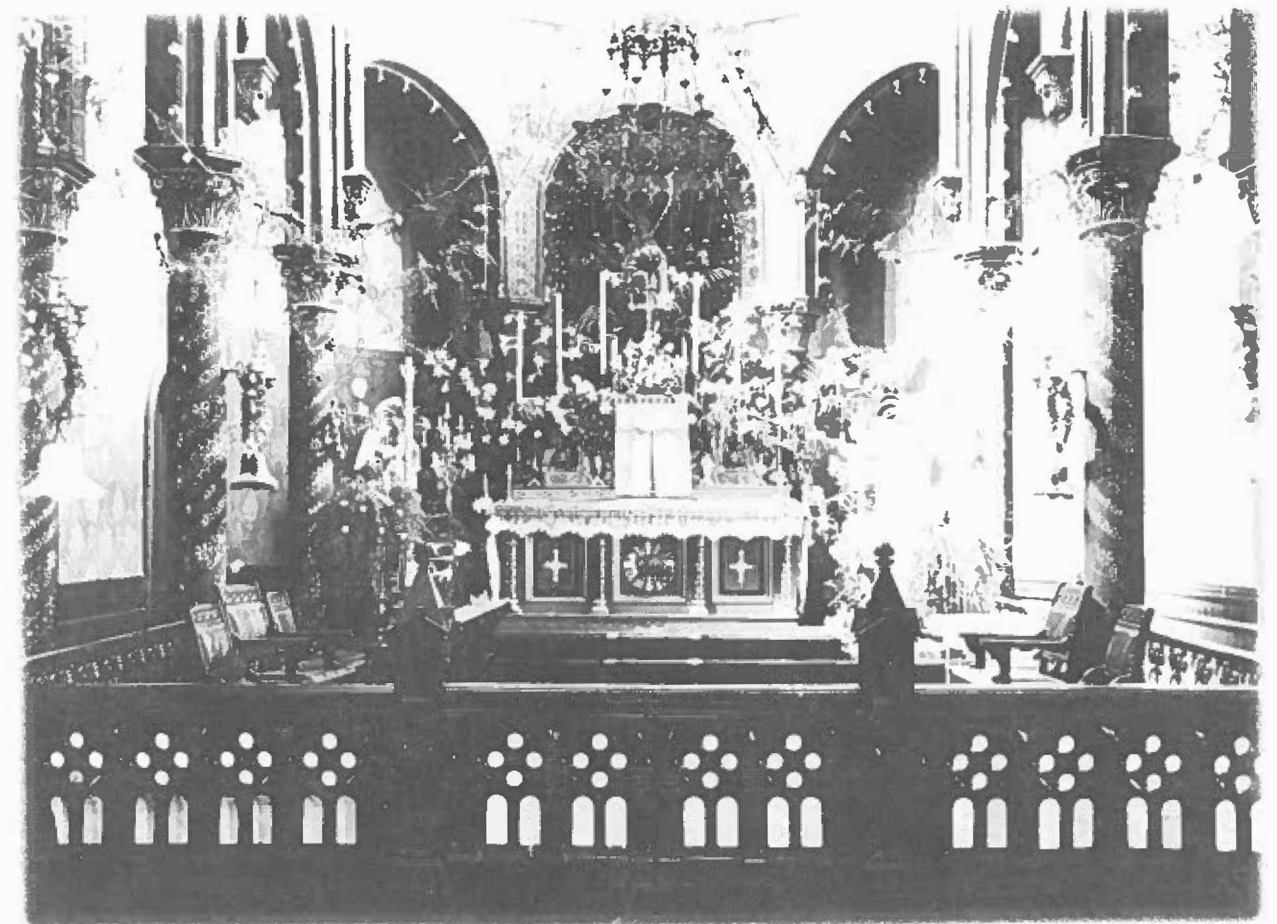
In that same letter, dated November 19, the new pastor described the church of which he had just taken charge: a rectangular brick building, 45 feet wide and 85 feet long. The ceiling was plain with no vaulting. The pews in the body of the church could accommodate 400 people; other pews placed around the perimeter and on either side of the choir loft could seat another 150 people. Allowing for another 50 persons standing beneath the choir loft, the good Father calculated that he could have a total of 600 worshippers. Thinking ahead, he mentioned that it would be possible to lengthen the church by 20 feet and to raise the walls by 10 feet. He was not exactly sure how to go about altering the façade of which he was not very fond; a half-tower with three openings, which he nicknamed, "the Tower of David." Concerning the interior of the church he wrote: "Like older ladies who were 'fashionable' in their youth, it has retained some of its pretense: it is carpeted from end to end; the pews of these California ladies are upholstered in green, red, or blue velvet, but though these women spent \$100 to fix up their pews, not a thing has been done to embellish the altars."

As for his living quarters, which he refers to as a "tenement" or a "cave," he says, "it is a series of miserable rooms built one after the other in the space alongside the church, with a 9-foot façade on Bush Street. It is 80 feet long. A single window opening onto the street lets in a bit of light and air, since on the one side, the rectory is attached to the church itself, blocking light on that side, and on the other side, another building leaves out the possibility of any openings." Fortunately, there was a door between his room and the church, allowing him to slip into the sanctuary "in the evening, to spend some time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament."

His commentary on the French colony is not full of praise: he describes it as a demanding and pretentious lot who want to have fine music and an eloquent speaker, but who do not frequent the sacraments. Notre Dame des Victoires is considered the "fashionable" church of San Francisco. As of Christmas 1885, he planned to establish the Exercises of the Society of the Immaculate Heart of Mary every Sunday evening, including the rosary, a 20-minute sermon, hymns, litanies, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. He hoped in this way to bring his straying parishioners to a greater degree of piety. His only consolation seemed to be the city of San Francisco itself which he admired with its hills, the bay, and its surrounding promontories. He found all of this impressive after the monotony of the

Louisiana swamplands. He wrote his brother that "he hasn't seen anything until he has seen San Francisco!"

As of January 1886, Father Renaudier sought to leave his unhealthy living quarters which he now calls, "a hole," "a shack," or even "the catacombs" where he contracted rheumatism, since the winter had proven to be particularly damp and rainy. He learned that the owner of a neighboring house to which his lodgings were attached, would sell his property for \$10,000. Archbishop Riordan agreed to let him borrow half of that amount on the condition that the French community contributes the other half. Fortunately for the new pastor, a French priest, Father de Castries, a missionary to the Indians in the Rocky Mountains, came to



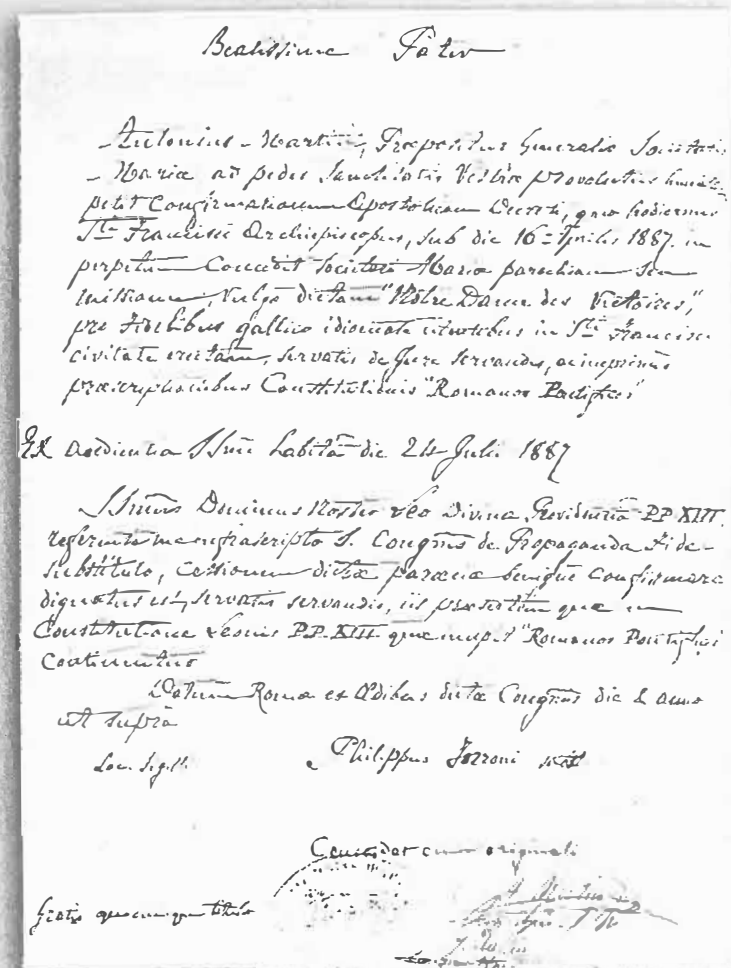
The Sanctuary of Notre Dame des Victoires before the 1906 Earthquake and Fire

San Francisco to rest and to visit a nephew; he accepted the task of calling upon the French families in order to promote interest in the project. With his help, \$5,000 was raised among the 6,000 French inhabitants.

After much negotiating, the property was purchased, the building wrecked and on October 20, construction commenced. The new rectory was to be two stories high: parlor, hall, dining room, kitchen, and cook's quarters on the first floor; four bedrooms and a study upstairs. Father Renaudier hoped to have two additional priests come and help him in his ministry. An alley was planned between the building and the church in order to allow for windows on three of its sides, a courtyard and small garden behind it. Upon entering the alley from Bush Street, the door to the rectory was on the left. During construction, Father Renaudier took up residence with nearby French friends, relieved of his rheumatism and delighted with the prospect of a decent place to live.

Construction took longer than Father Renaudier had estimated, but it was completed in the spring of 1887. The rectory was a large wooden house, as were most of the San Francisco buildings of that era. It was surmounted with a cross. The alley entrance was an arched doorway, the walk itself was paved, and over it passed a bridge which connected the up-

per level of the rectory with the church. On March 28, Archbishop Riordan came to bless



On July 24, 1887, Pope Leo XIII placed Notre dame des Victoires under the charge of the Marists for perpetuity. In this letter, the Pope also designated Notre Dame des Victoires as a National French Church

the new building, while on that same date Father Renaudier celebrated the 25th anniversary of his religious profession.

Father Leterrier, S.M., the Provincial of the American Province, had come to San Francisco for this event. It was his first visit since the arrival of Father Renaudier whom he found to be in good health, happy with his assignment, held in high esteem by both his Archbishop and parishioners alike. Gradually, the French

community returned to the church, glad to have a priest who welcomed them and paid visits to the sick members of their community. Though it is difficult to judge the success of a parish from Mass attendance figures alone, we can see from the registry that the number of marriages increased from 25 to about 100 a year, and the baptisms increased from 120 to 150 from the time of Father Renaudier's arrival. It was now necessary to provide him with an assistant, or he might not survive the demands of the job. Toward the end of 1887, Father Félix Barbier, S.M., was assigned to San Francisco, where he arrived at the beginning of the new year. Since he had some architectural skills, he was asked by Father Renaudier to draw up plans for the restoration of the church.

Meanwhile, Father Antoine Martin, S.M.,

the Superior General, and Archbishop Riordan agreed to request that Rome place Notre Dame des Victoires under the charge of the Marists for perpetuity in order to ensure ministry to the French-speaking Catholics. Upon the recommendation of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Pope Leo XIII assented and signed the decree on July 24, 1887. From that date on, Notre Dame des Victoires would be considered the National French Parish; that is, it would have no territorial limits, and any French citizen can be married or baptized there or interred from that church whether or not he resides in California or is just there on a visit. The French Church, as it was called from the beginning, was in fact located on the boundary of St. Mary's Parish, and Father Renaudier had always hoped that Archbishop Riordan, who



The renovation of the church by Fr. Renaudier started on May 1888. The architects were Huerne & Everett, the contractor was J. L. Binet, the cost was estimated at \$10,208 paid in 4 installments of \$2,552. The job was completed and fully paid for in 35 days with the brickwork finished and mortar applied.



The Shrine of Our Lady of Victories. Eglise Notre Dame des Victoires before the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.
Photograph courtesy of the California Historical Society, FN-36254

now had his new cathedral, would give him jurisdiction over the territory of the former one. But this never came to pass.

Father Barbier set to work immediately; consulting contractors and drawing up the plans. He decided not to work on the façade of this former Baptist Church for the time being, but that the interior would be completely remodeled. In what had been a big hall, he would build one central aisle, 20 feet wide, flanked by two side aisles, each of which would be 12 feet wide. Columns placed at 12-foot intervals down the length of the church would give the edifice a Roman look. Father Barbier claimed to have taken his inspiration for the design from St. Ambrose Church in Paris, built between 1865 and 1869, but he only raised the

height of the old church by 17 feet. A dome replaced the formerly flat ceiling. As a result, the interior was a small-scale copy of St. Ambrose Church, and we can picture it well since the church was reconstructed according to the very same plans after its destruction in 1906, with the exception of the exterior parts.

A talented painter, Father Barbier decorated the walls of the new church whose description appears in the *Monitor* in July 15, 1893:

"The dome of the church is cerulean blue in color, dotted with gold stars, and the arches which support it are heavily gilded. The walls are frescoed in the Gothic style, and the church is lighted by handsome stained-glass votive windows. Each window bears a Latin inscription giving the name of the donor. The windows on the side of the church are emblematic of the various invocations in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. On the columns which support the galleries are verses

in Latin taken from the 'Ave Maris Stella.' The Stations of the Cross are painted directly on the walls of the church and are exquisitely executed. They are the work of a Parisian artist named Can. The altars which are located at the north end of the church are very handsomely appointed. The main and side altars are separated by high wrought-iron railings capped by heavy mahogany rail, each one having a separate rail. The altar to the left of the main altar is the shrine of Our Lady of Victories, the special devotion of the church. The altar is always prettily adorned with flowers and lights are constantly burning upon it."

The remodeling began in May 1888. Previously, the Fathers had held bazaars which brought in \$2,400, a fourth of the amount deemed necessary to cover the cost of the renovation project. Everything was going along well, except that a violent storm erupted on the night of September 14 and 15 while the church was still without a roof. An inch of water covered the floor and it was impossible to hold Mass there the following Sunday. Mass was celebrated in the rectory parlor instead. Early in 1889, Father Renaudier and his assistant had a difference of opinion about the paintings in the church. Father Barbier had designed some motifs which were not to Father Renaudier's liking. The pastor had the dome above the main altar decorated with a sun surrounded by clouds. At its center appeared the insignia of the Blessed Virgin. Father Barbier had no praise for this design and also criticized the Lourdes Grotto which made its appearance without his having been consulted. "After God, I am the boss in my church," was Father Renaudier's response to his assistant who then requested a transfer, but had to wait until 1892 before obtaining it. While Father Barbier was an artist of great sensitivity, Father Renaudier just forged ahead, took the initiative, and got things done without much attention to tact.

It was partly thanks to him that the Marist Fathers came to Salt Lake City, Utah. He learned that the local bishop was looking for a congregation to take over a college founded in 1886, and in which 167 students were already

enrolled. Although he was in the midst of his renovation project, Father Renaudier wrote letter after letter to his Superior to convince him to take on "All Hallows College." He assured him that Utah was a region with a future and a rapidly growing population. He praised the climate, and his only mistake was to assume that the Mormon Church would not get in the Marists' way, "for it is destined to disappear soon." The Society agreed to send three priests at the beginning of the academic year in September 1889. The first years were hard ones, but Father Renaudier helped his colleagues as best as he could, and even sent them French cooks that he recruited in San Francisco when they found themselves in distress. The college functioned until 1918.

Father Renaudier certainly did not neglect the interests of his parish. In his letters mentioning the purchase of property and his renovation plans, he also spoke of what he called "the spiritual edifice of Christian life," which he hoped to build within souls. Each year, he preached a series of Lenten sermons and complained of adding only a handful of newcomers to the fold. This was quite a change after his experience in Louisiana where practice of the Faith was much more intense. He was especially sad when the dying refused the last sacraments. Many members of the French colony belonged to the Masonic lodges whose anti-clerical bent was rooted in the Voltairian philosophy of the previous century. Among the French in San Francisco at the time, there were some 2,000 Jews who had fled Alsace-Lorraine after 1870 in order to escape German rule.

Upon closer examination, the French parish did not appear entirely deserted, however, as the attendance at Sunday Masses numbered about 700 or 800 – twice the number a century later. The French community was less spread out than it is at the present time. A First Com-

munion class in Father Renaudier's time would number 50 French students. In order to reach out to more people, the pastor thought of opening a parish school. This project would not come to fruition for another 35 years.

On May 30, 1889, Pope Leo XIII beatified the Marist priest, Father Peter Chanel, who had gone to convert the Polynesians of the Island of Futuna in the South Pacific. Murdered on April 28, 1841, he became Oceania's first martyr. He was also the first Marist to be venerated, so Father Renaudier erected a shrine dedicated to Blessed Peter Chanel, ordered a statue to be made in France, and a reliquary containing a relic of the martyr. A solemn Triduum opened on October 10, 1890, presided over by the Archbishop who preached a sermon and blessed the statue of Peter Chanel which lay on a bed of straw mats from Oceania, with the instruments of his martyrdom, a club and an adze, at his feet. All the children from the city's parochial schools gathered to pray to him that afternoon and to hear the story of his martyrdom. That evening, Solemn Benediction was offered in the courtyard with a 60-piece orchestra playing a cantata summarizing the martyr's life, after a eulogy given by the Superior of the Jesuit Order.

The following day, special Masses were scheduled for the faithful of various ethnic origins, with sermons in Italian, German, and Spanish. The Superior of the Dominicans gave a second eulogy that evening, and Haendel's "Alleluia Chorus" was performed. On Sunday, October 20, the Archbishop of San Francisco and Most Reverend Bourgade, Bishop of Arizona, officiated at a solemn Pontifical Mass preceded by a huge procession. Twelve priests and sixty children carried palm branches 5 feet high while Fathers Renaudier and Barbier transported the reliquary on a red velvet platform. The good Fathers hoped that these ceremonies along with the intercession

of Father Chanel would aid in rekindling the spark of Faith in the hearts of their parishioners, many of whom had allowed it to die out when they left their homeland.

During Holy Week in 1891, the Apostolic Delegate from the Fiji Islands was in San Francisco: Bishop Vidal officiated at the Easter liturgy and these ceremonies were once again beneficial in bringing the French of San Francisco out of their spiritual lethargy. Undaunted, Father Renaudier never missed a chance to reach out to them. That same year, he entered into negotiations to bring the Little Sisters of the Poor to San Francisco to work with the elderly; he also desired that the Sisters of Bon Secours to come and make home visits to the sick people. He planned to purchase land in Oakland in order to build a chapel for the use of some 800 French people who lived across the bay. Noticing a house for sale near the church in San Francisco, he arranged to raise the necessary funds for its purchase and to install an order of teaching Sisters. Keeping in mind the Archbishop's plan to open a seminary, this time in San Rafael, he wrote to his Superior General asking him to designate several priests in advance for the purpose of staffing it when the time was ripe. The end result was the arrival of Sulpician priests in 1892.

Changes were in the wind: Father Barbier left San Francisco and was replaced by Father Emile Gente, S.M. Father Renaudier himself was assigned as pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires in Boston, Massachusetts. We owe a great deal to him and to his 7-year ministry: not only did he take the singular initiative – rare for a religious in those days – to assume charge of the French parish without explicit permission from his superiors, but he also reanimated his apathetic community, while at the same time laying the ground work for many projects to come. He was truly the right man at the right time!

Chapter 3: The Turn of the Century: 1892-1905

Father Emile Gente, S.M., who had then been assistant priest in San Francisco for 6 months, came from the diocese of Viviers in France. After his ordination, he was assigned to various colleges, first in Boston and then in Lawrence, Massachusetts, before coming to California. He thus began an East-West odyssey which took him to St. Paul and then to Portland on the Pacific Coast. From the moment he arrived in San Francisco, he was impressed by the beauty of the city, its mild climate, and rich California soil. But he was also quite surprised to find that those who attended the French parish were mainly French-speaking Americans, Spaniards, Italians, and English, and that some were Protestants who came to hear a "good sermon" or the music in a church that was considered fashionable.

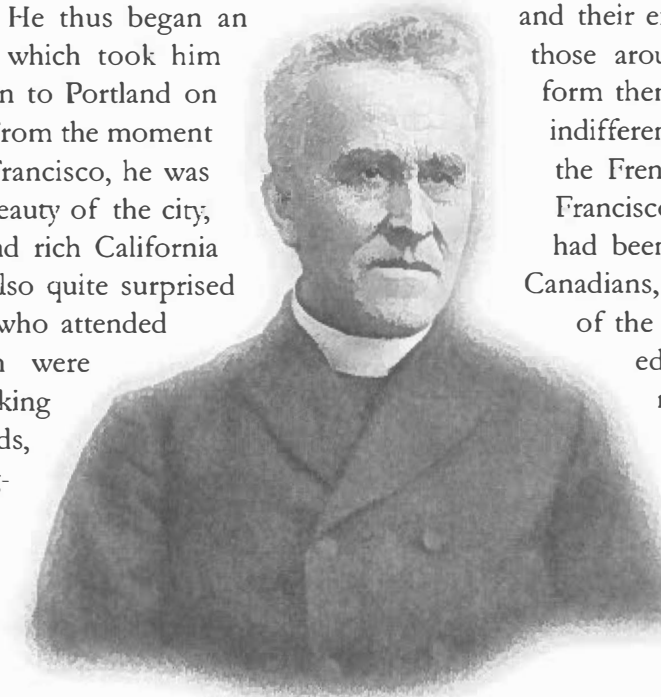
He decided that he had to seek out and minister to the Basque and Béarnais immigrants who were uneducated and left out, rather than preach to "society . . . that came for a lesson in French for pittance."

Father Henri Audiffred, S.M., was sent to replace Father Renaudier in May of 1892. He was 64 years old and had been in America for many years, having been assigned to Lawrence, St. Paul, and Boston before coming to San

Francisco. It was he who founded the Archiconfrérie of Notre Dame des Victoires which existed until 1992 and was affiliated with the one in Paris. In this way, he hoped that the women who met each month would find this

as a means to strengthen their faith and their example would inspire those around them and transform them from their religious indifference, characteristic of the French population in San Francisco in those days. He had been used to the French Canadians, loyal in their practice of the faith, who had migrated to New England. He now shuddered upon observing his parishioners, "pleasure-seeking, going to balls, dances, the theater, parties . . ." He also had to combat the influence of the local French newspaper which was considered "materialistic, immoral, and irreligious."

Then, another assistant was appointed to minister to the young people, Father Maurice Rousselon, S.M., a native of Paris who was 31 years old. Every Sunday morning, he taught catechism and he formed a children's choir. He took the boys to serve Benediction at the convent of the Presentation Sisters and directed them during High Mass where it was



Fr. Henri Audiffred, S.M., Pastor, 1892-1895

not uncommon to see two dozen altar boys assisting with dignity. One of them, Philippe Dagneau, would one day enter the Marist Order and become the first vocation from Notre Dame des Victoires. He also organized outings and all-day picnics and, at Christmas time, he invited a group of 50 boys to a party at the rectory to gather around the Christmas tree. Little gifts were distributed to the boys, whose organization was dedicated to St. Aloysius Gonzaga.



Unfortunately, Father Gente and Father Rousselon did not get along well with Father Audiffred whom they accused of being sharp and tactless. He had fired the organist and two female singers because they participated in public concerts – and the choir found itself disrupted. When a well-known general complained that a cook and her drunken husband took his pew, the priest replied that, in the eyes

of God, all people are equal. Soon worshippers began to go to Old St. Mary's instead, which had experienced a revival under the Paulist Fathers, and the French parish began to be deserted and forgotten. This was the last straw, and the old pastor requested his transfer which took him to Boston in 1895.



Left: Fr. Emile Gente, S.M., Pastor, 1895-1897
Top: Fr. Alexandre Loude, S.M., Pastor, 1897-1899

Father Emile Gente became the pastor and Father Alexandre Loude, 43 years of age, became second assistant priest. The three priests worked together harmoniously and their efforts began to bear fruit: in 1896, the First Communion Class numbered 108 children. Baptisms and marriages were on the increase. Almost all the deceased French people were buried from the church. Father Gente got along well with the Paulists and even with a Protestant minister who had recently arrived from Paris. This young man with a degree from Sorbonne was active, intelligent, and zealous. He opened a French language school and founded a newspaper called, *Le Relèvement*. He gave lectures

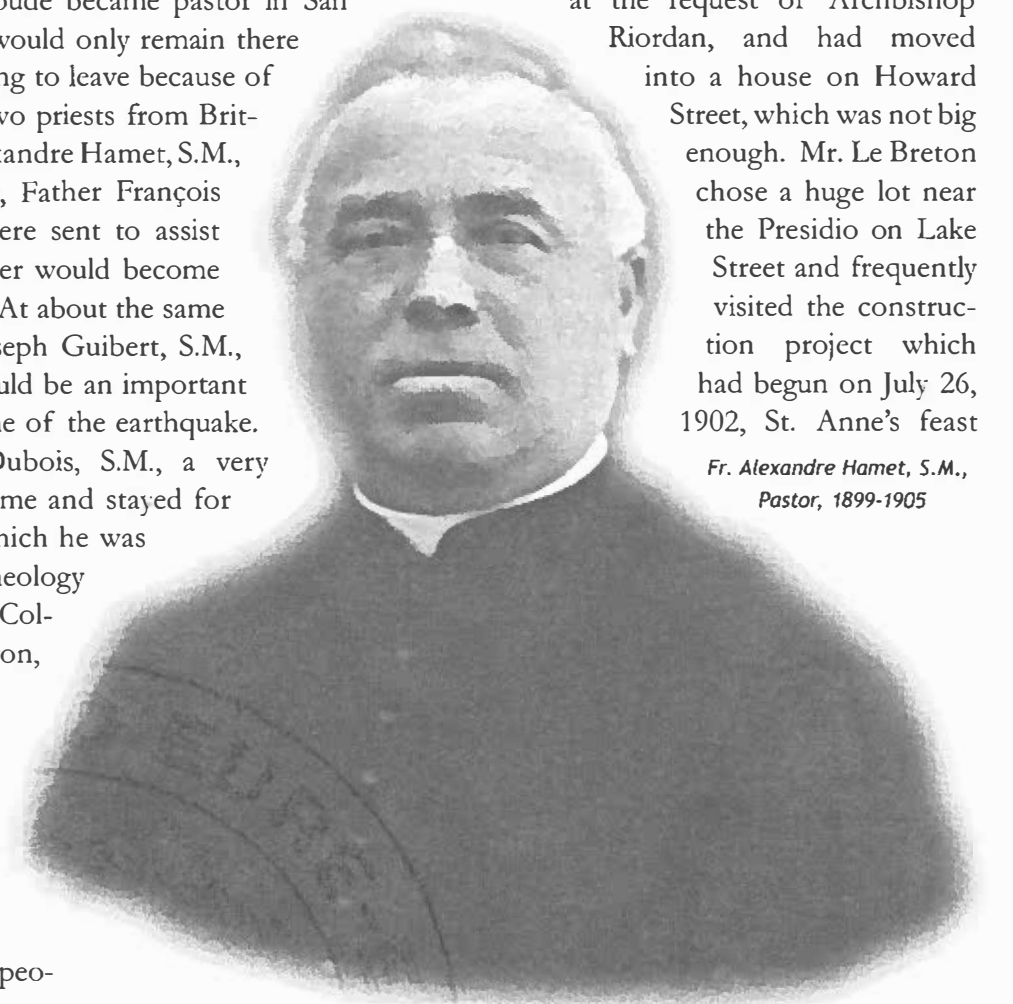
and concerts, but, concluded Father Gente with satisfaction, this Protestant minister had not yet converted a single Frenchman!

In the meantime, Father Renaudier had become the Provincial of the American Province and had the intention of founding a center in Mexico. During the San Francisco stay of a French naval vessel, Admiral de Cuverville had gone to the parish to tell the pastor of the large French colony in Mexico City, and suggested that it might be a good idea to send them a priest. Bishop Alarçon had agreed to give the Marists an old 18th century church in the heart of the city for the use of the French people. In 1897, Father Gente and Father Rousselon were assigned to Mexico City and founded the parish, Notre Dame de Lourdes. Thus, Father Loude became pastor in San Francisco. He would only remain there for 2 years, having to leave because of poor health. Two priests from Brittany, Father Alexandre Hamet, S.M., and his brother, Father François Hamet, S.M., were sent to assist him. The former would become pastor in 1899. At about the same time, Father Joseph Guibert, S.M., arrived. He would be an important figure at the time of the earthquake. Father Léon Dubois, S.M., a very young priest, came and stayed for 2 years, after which he was sent to teach Theology at the Marist College in Washington, D.C.

From the moment he arrived, Father Hamet was shocked by the small number of French peo-

ple who attended their church. Moreover, the rapid turnover of personnel (eight in 6 years) had discouraged many parishioners and had alienated foreigners who, little by little went over to St. Mary's where the Paulist Fathers had organized a number of parish activities. Some of the French people had even written to the Superior General of the Marist Order to complain of the incessant changes at Notre dame des Victoires.

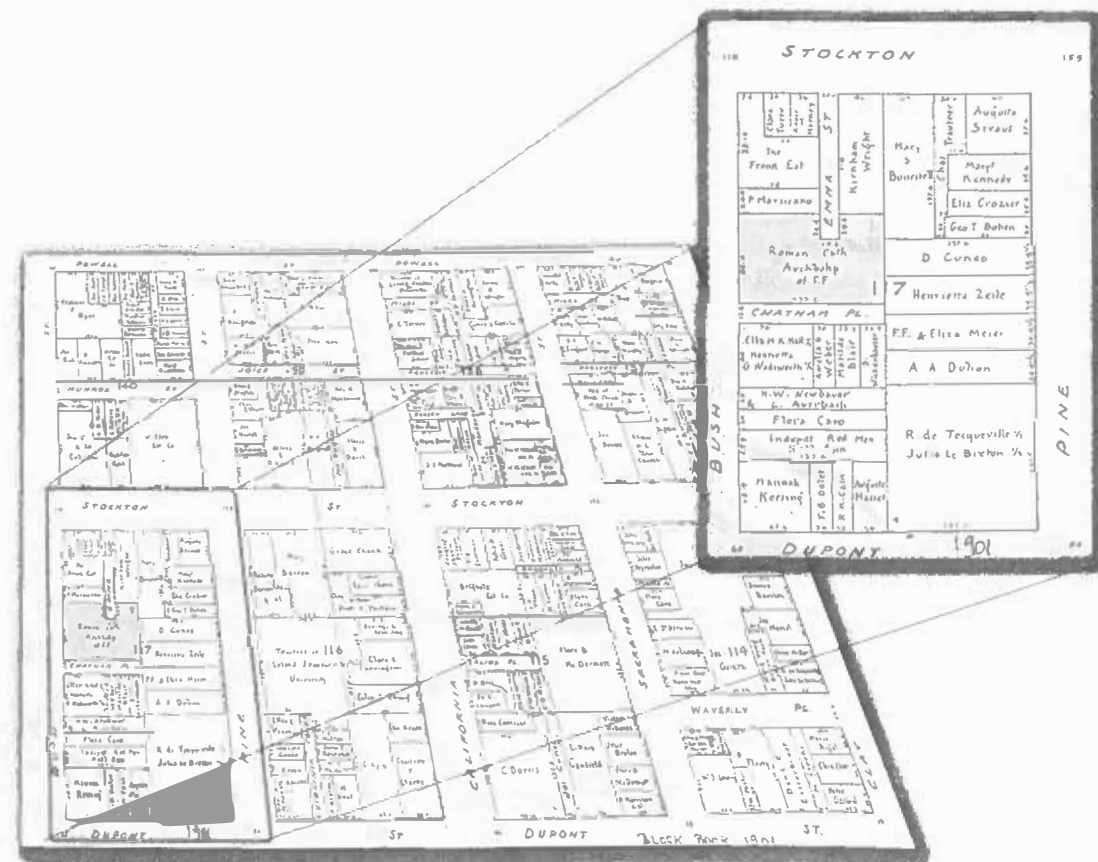
In 1901, one of the Frenchmen most attached to the parish, Edouard Le Breton, President of the French Bank, donated \$100,000 toward the purchase of land and the construction of a building where the Little Sisters of the Poor could house and care for the elderly. Three of the sisters had just come from France at the request of Archbishop Riordan, and had moved into a house on Howard Street, which was not big enough. Mr. Le Breton chose a huge lot near the Presidio on Lake Street and frequently visited the construction project which had begun on July 26, 1902, St. Anne's feast



Fr. Alexandre Hamet, S.M.,
Pastor, 1899-1905

day. It was completed on May 13, 1904. He continued to endow the Little Sisters, encouraged other benefactors to help them, and stipulated only two conditions: that Saint Anne be the patroness of the home and that the building bear an inscription in honor of his own parents above the entrance just under the statue of St. Joseph. A French chaplain was needed, and Father Philippe Nast, S.M., an Alsatian priest, was sent to Notre Dame des Victoires in 1904. He arose every morning at 4:30, took a California Street cable car and arrived at the Little Sisters' home for the 6:00 a.m. Mass. It was he who administered the last rites to Mr. Le Breton on March 19, 1910, the feast of St. Joseph, when he became seriously ill right after the Mass. He died among the poor whom he loved and helped with all the means available to him.

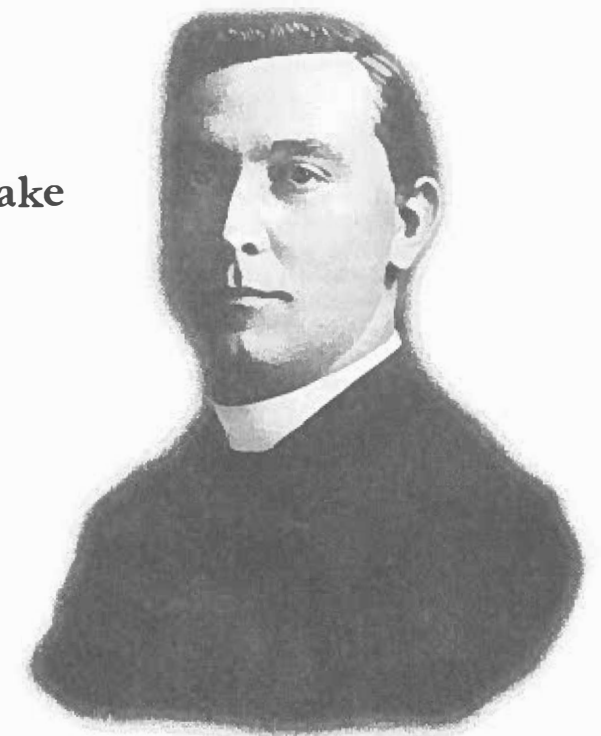
In the Block Book of San Francisco, Year 1901, Notre Dame des Victoires is listed as the property of the Roman Catholic Archbishop. Please note the dead end of Emma Street between the rectory and the garden. In 1907, this section of the dead end street was eliminated. Grant Avenue, in 1901, was called Dupont Street. Le Breton and de Tocqueville owned a large parcel of land in the corner of Dupont and Pine streets.



During the 6 years of his pastorate, Father Alexandre Hamet earned the respect of his parishioners with his devotion, kindness, and eloquence. He helped in developing the Archiconfrérie and the catechism program, enlarged the rectory in order to house the four priests who would henceforth be in residence, purchased a new organ, and had the church freshly painted. By the time he was assigned pastor of St. Louis Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, he had paid off the entire debt remaining and had left a thriving parish to his successor, Father Joseph Guibert, S.M. It was just as well that he was not there to see all his work reduced to ashes on April 18, 1906.

Chapter 4: After the Earthquake And Great Fire: 1906-1921

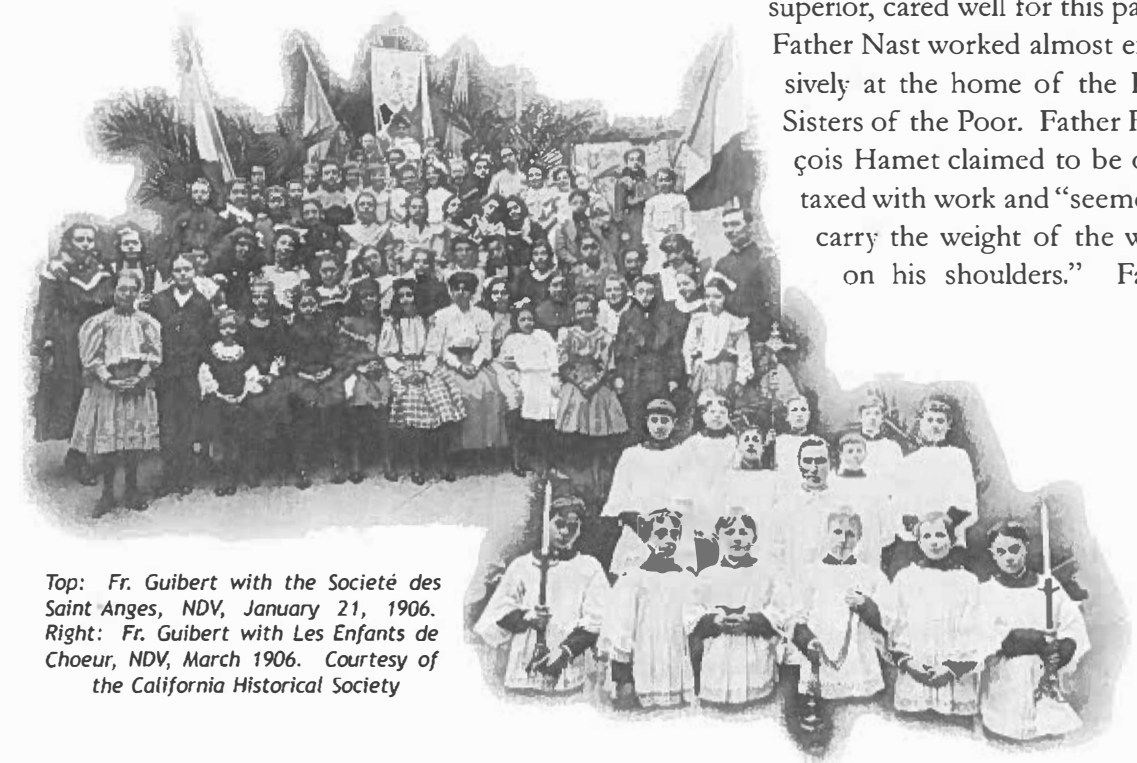
It so happened that Father Portal, S.M., Provincial Superior, visited the Fathers in San Francisco at the beginning of April 1906 and sent a report to the Superior General of the Marist Order. This report gives us an idea of the situation at Notre Dame des Victoires just 2 weeks before the catastrophe which was to level the city. The French population of San Francisco was estimated at 8,000 of whom 10 percent fulfilled their religious obligations. The church which had a capacity of 350 was never full, and Father could count 150 present at High Mass on Sunday. Nevertheless quite a bit of money was spent on music and song in order to attract worshippers. With societies such as the Archiconfrérie and the children's programs, it was hoped that religious practice



Fr. Joseph Guibert, S.M., Pastor, 1905-1908

would be promoted: "Here, the people don't come to the priest; it's up to the priest to go to them. This is the true missionary life."

Father Joseph Guibert, S.M., pastor and superior, cared well for this parish. Father Nast worked almost exclusively at the home of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Father François Hamet claimed to be overtaxed with work and "seemed to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders." Father



Top: Fr. Guibert with the Société des Saint Anges, NDV, January 21, 1906. Right: Fr. Guibert with Les Enfants de Choeur, NDV, March 1906. Courtesy of the California Historical Society

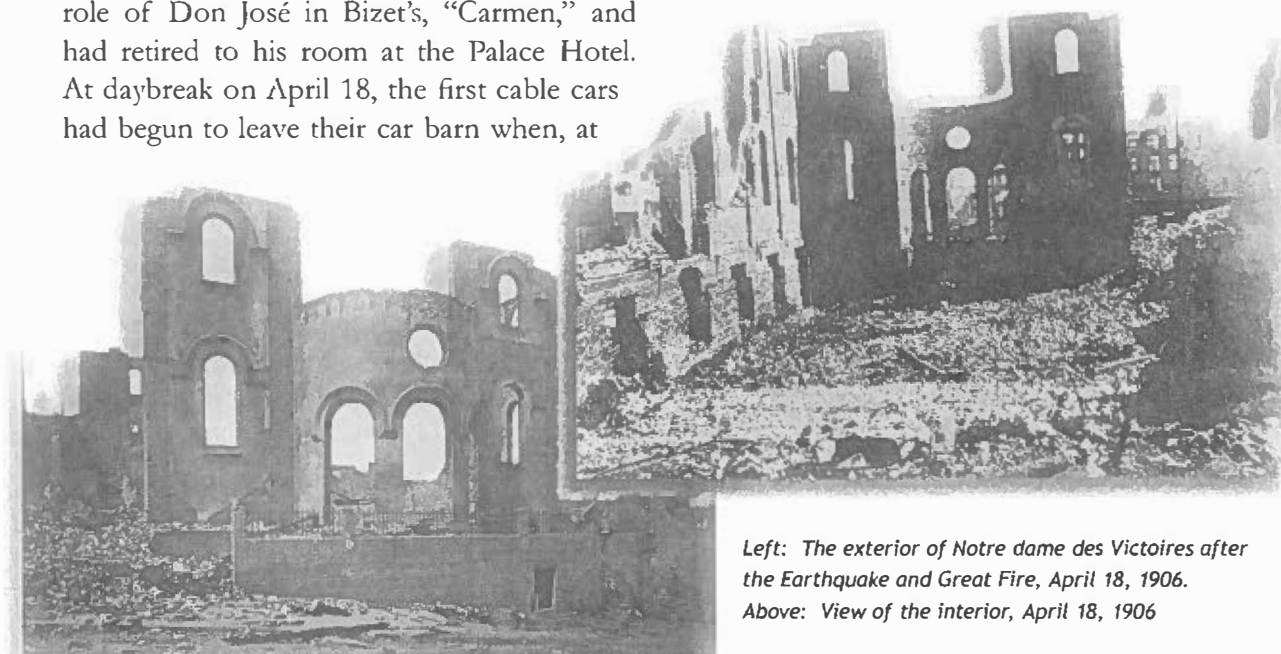


Top: Enfants de Marie de Notre Dame des Victoires with Fr. Hamet seen here standing in the second row at the far right.
December 31, 1905. Courtesy of the California Historical Society, FN-36246
Bottom: Sodality de St. Louis de Gonzague with Fr. Guibert standing in the second row at the far right.
Courtesy of the California Historical Society, FN-36247

Henri Thiery, S.M., the new assistant, complained that he didn't have enough to do. The financial situation was good and the Marist community was able to give \$3,000 to the Province of America, considerably more than other contributions from the various Marist parishes. To sum it all up, the future outlook was good, once they could settle the problem of Father Hamet, "who was never satisfied, anywhere."

Wednesday, April 17, 1906, had been a beautiful day – as is so often the case in spring in San Francisco. Enrico Caruso had sung the role of Don José in Bizet's, "Carmen," and had retired to his room at the Palace Hotel. At daybreak on April 18, the first cable cars had begun to leave their car barn when, at

Watching the flames mount toward the church on Bush Street, the Fathers buried the sacred vessels in the courtyard garden along with the registry of marriages and christenings. Several days later, they would find these things intact. Notre Dame des Victoires is one of the rare parishes that has preserved its records from before the fire. Since the archives at City Hall were destroyed, many French people would come to the church to obtain a copy of their baptismal certificates to prove to insurance companies – who were sometimes skeptical



Left: The exterior of Notre dame des Victoires after the Earthquake and Great Fire, April 18, 1906.
Above: View of the interior, April 18, 1906

5:12 a.m., the earth trembled. It shook for about 90 seconds, but it seemed an eternity to San Franciscans. Houses folded up, cornices and chimneys crumbled, steel rails twisted like hemp cord, while church bells, as if maddened, tolled wildly. The roof of Notre Dame des Victoires collapsed, but the church itself remained standing. Gas mains ruptured and fires broke out all over the city, readily consuming the wooden structures. Firefighters were soon overburdened and planned to dynamite entire blocks in order to protect the rest of the city, but the wind spread the fire all around.

of claims for losses – that they were indeed in San Francisco prior to 1906. They say that some people regretted not having had their children baptized there as they now had no identification papers.

Taking some clothing, the Fathers left Bush Street when smoke invaded the church and they went to the home of the Little Sisters of the Poor whose building had not been damaged. Several days later, relinquishing their places to less fortunate people, Fathers Guibert and Thiery were lodged by a French family for \$25 a month. Father Hamet went to the convent of the Helpers of the Holy Souls and Father

Nast stayed with the Little Sisters of the Poor. Over two-thirds of the French community had lost everything, and many would leave for the outskirts of the city, or to other towns such as Oakland or Berkeley, adding to the dispersion of the French colony.

Religious services would resume, initially, in the chapel of the Little Sisters of the Poor, then Father Guibert decided to build a temporary chapel on a piece of land loaned to him by a friend for an indeterminate period of time. Seeking permission, he went to see the Archbishop who withheld his answer for a time, only to later refuse to allow it outright. It seems that neighboring pastors protested. There remained of the church but a few parts of the walls, and construction would be out of the question for a long while. The insurance would only pay \$18,000. They decided to start reconstruction by building a crypt, or basement, which would serve as a place for Sunday Mass and catechism classes and which could be rented out during the week for dinners and meetings — a means of generating funds. By Sunday, October 6, 1907, the hall had been completed and was ready to be used for worship after the singing of a solemn, "Te Deum." Three Masses would be held there each Sunday, and one on weekdays. For weddings and major feast days, they would continue to use the chapel of the Little Sisters' home.

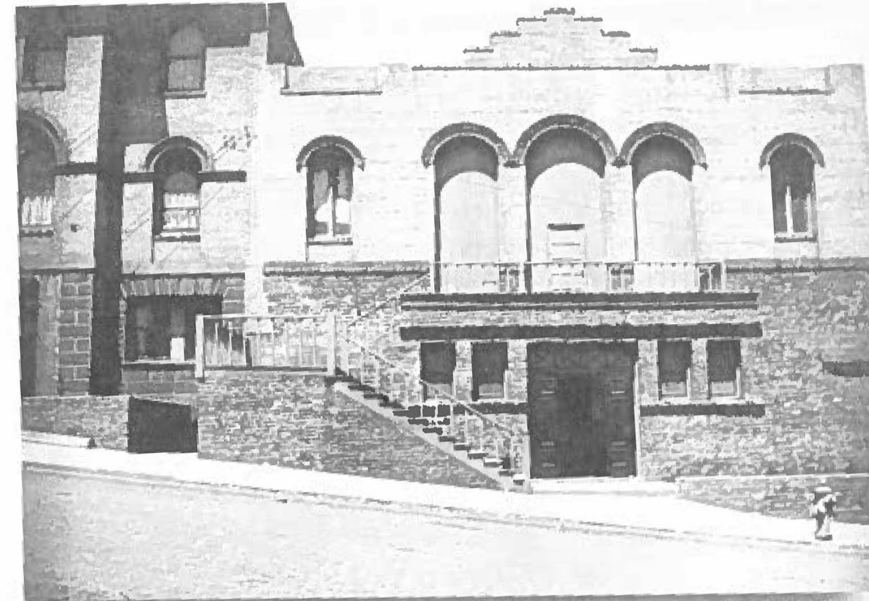
Even before the basement was complet-

ed, Father Guibert drew up plans to rebuild the rectory and the church. He intended to recess the building in order to have a nicer entry on Bush Street, with a small garden. This would make the church façade stand out even more. But there was a little lane, named Emma, off Stockton Street running behind the rectory and ending in a cul-de-sac. It was impossible to obtain a permit from the city to build on that little alley which was between the rectory and the garden. It seems the problem was settled long afterwards, since today, that lane ends at the rectory wall. The cost of the new residence was estimated at \$24,000, and in one year, Father Guibert, going from door to door to his parishioners, collected one-third of the required sum. But his health had been debilitated by physical fatigue and the shock resulting from the destruction of his church by the terrible earthquake and fire.

One day, while dining with Archbishop Riordan, he fainted. On another occasion,



The church hall where religious services were temporarily held during the reconstruction of Notre Dame des Victoires after the Earthquake and Great Fire of 1906



Front view of church hall before the reconstruction of the Church, June 1910

while celebrating Sunday Mass, he had to stop and was unable to continue the service. The doctors could not find anything wrong and Father Guibert claimed that he was not ill. On June 21, 1907, Father Guibert had another attack while walking down Van Ness Avenue and the police had to bring him home in a car. This time, the doctor diagnosed the problem as epilepsy and prescribed a 4-month period of rest. The priest was sent to Boston and Father Joseph Sollier, S.M., was assigned to replace him as pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires in 1908.

A Doctor of Theology, Professor of Philosophy, Dogma, and Canon Law in various seminaries, and later a Superior of the Scholasticate in Washington, D.C., Father Sollier was a scholar and a most eloquent speaker. The French Order of Sulpicians who taught at the diocesan seminary in Menlo Park often came to consult with him. He had the pleasure of seeing a former altar boy from the French parish, Father Philippe Dagneau, now a Marist priest, celebrate his first Mass in July 1909 in the hall

which then still served as a church. His only weakness appears to be that he sniffed tobacco.

Although his own church was not yet finished, he decided to build a chapel for the French who lived in the Bay View district to the south of San Francisco. There were many families clustered around the slaughter houses in an area which would be known as, "Butchertown." The chapel, completed in 1910, was



Fr. Joseph Sollier, S.M., Pastor 1908-1911

dedicated to St. Jeanne d'Arc and was located on L Street. Father Guibert came back to serve there. His health had improved, and he was an active and devoted pastor. He came to Bush Street for his meals and lodging. He was assisted at St. Jeanne d'Arc parish by the Helpers of the Holy Souls who had a convent on Haight Street and whose Superior was Mother Donatien.

It was during this period that Father Nast was replaced by an Irish priest, Father Michael Murphy, S.M., who would remain in San Francisco for nearly 20 years. His entire mission was the care of the old people at the home of the Little Sisters of the Poor. There were well over 200 men and women in that institution. Father Murphy was nicknamed, "Sunshine Murphy," because of the club he organized among the old people. It was called the "Sunshine Club" and its objective was to spread happiness and contentment among those abandoned and neglected by their own families. Father Murphy was one of the most colorful priests in the San Francisco Archdiocese. Every morning at Bush Street, he would arise, dress, and walk to the Sutter Street carline, catching the 5:20 a.m. car. If he was a minute or so late, the motorman would wait and would listen for the sound of a whistle, which Father usually blew to announce that he was coming.

He was Irish in his looks, in his speech, and in his manners, recalls Father Dagneau. One St. Patrick's Day, Father Murphy was full of

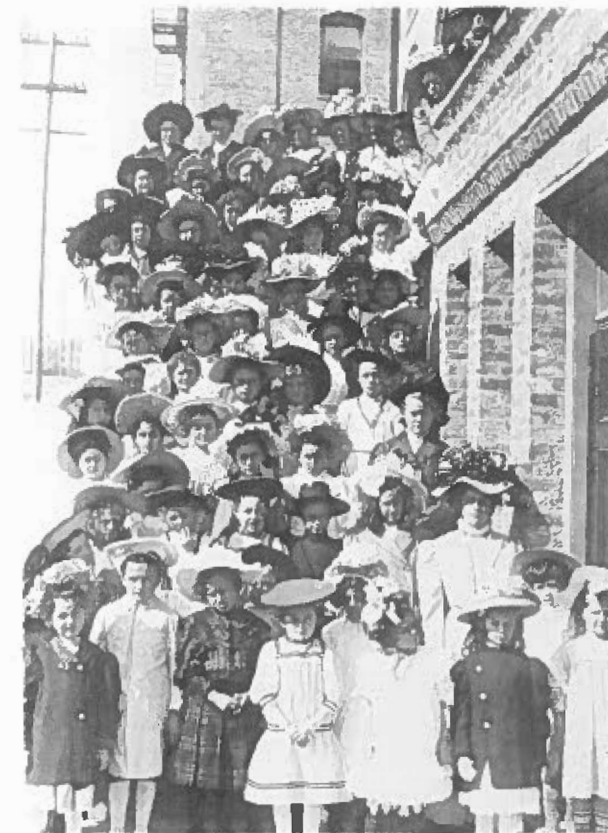
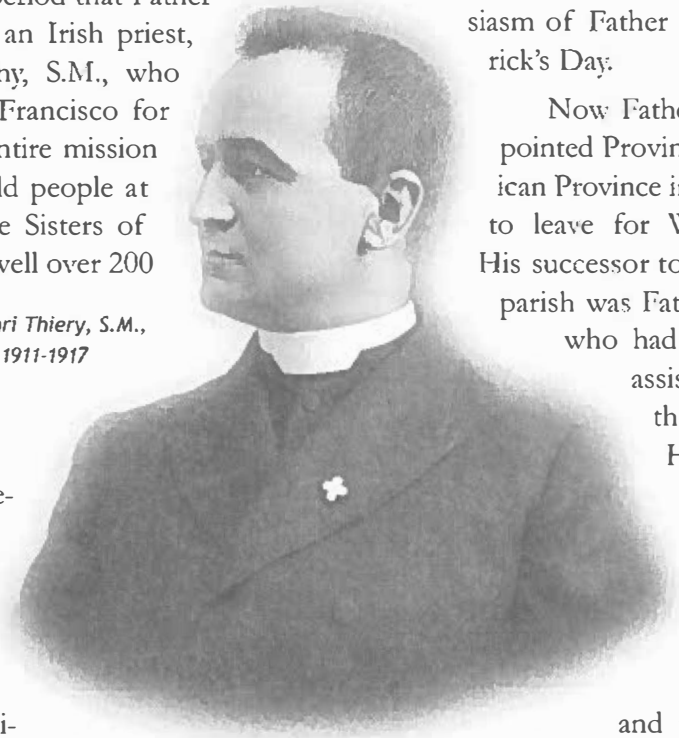
enthusiasm and waxed strong on the glory and doings of the Irish people. Father Guibert listened for a long time until his patience gave out. "I suppose," he said, "that you will soon be claiming that Adam and Eve were Irish." That stopped Father Murphy, and with eyes wide open, he asked, "How did you make that out?" Father Guibert replied, "They were the first to wear the green." That was the end of the joy, the exuberance, and the enthusiasm of Father Murphy's St. Patrick's Day.

Now Father Sollier was appointed Provincial of the American Province in 1911 and he had to leave for Washington, D.C. His successor to head the French parish was Father Henri Thiéry, S.M., who had already been an assistant there for the past 4 years. His first priority upon assuming the position of pastor was to reactivate construction of the church and to interest all of

the French people in the project, regardless of their attitude toward religious practice. It had been 5 years since the construction of the basement hall which served as a place of worship and above which would rise the new church. Nothing more had been done about it then. It was easy to arouse the patriotic fiber of the French by pointing out to them that the German community had rebuilt St. Boniface Church, the Spanish community – Mission Dolores, and even the Slovenian Catholics had their parish church; but not the French.

Influential members of the French colony

Fr. Henri Thiéry, S.M.,
Pastor 1911-1917



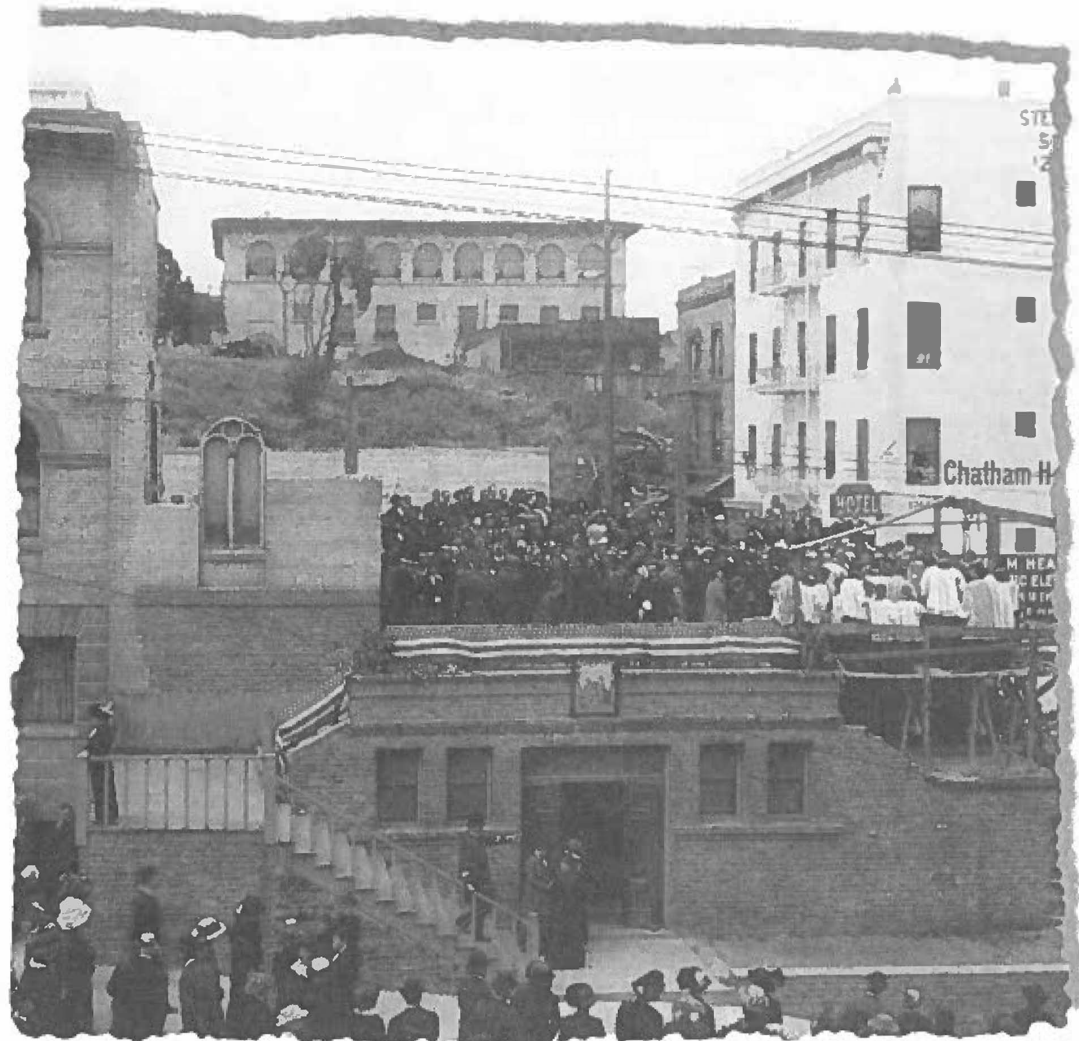
October 4, 1908. Left: Group of girls in front of entrance to the church basement before the church reconstruction. Right: Group of boys in front of the entrance to the church basement before the church reconstruction. Notre Dame des Victoires. Courtesy of California Historical Society, FN-36252 and FN-36253.

such as Attorney Bergerot, Doctors Canac-Marquis, Artigues, and Etcheverry, and notably, the presidents of the French Bank, Charles Carpy and Léon Bocqueraz wrote articles in the *Franco-Californien* to initiate a fund drive. An anti-clerical minority responded, such as Doctor Juilly who wrote in the same paper, "Let the Church fend for itself; the Archbishop is wealthy enough to provide his pastors with funds." But little by little, most of the French, whether or not they practiced their faith, got together to form a pledge committee for the purpose of raising the necessary funds.

Lyric Hall, April 17, 1912, was the site of a huge meeting where Charles Carpy spoke eloquently and pledged \$500. Pierre Bergerot spoke in turn and offered \$200. Father Thiéry was called upon to present his plans and the

financial situation of the parish: in round figures, \$60,000 seemed necessary to assure construction, and a loan would be necessary. A finance committee and a construction committee were appointed; a pledge sheet was passed around; and, by the end of the evening, the sum of \$10,000 had been reached. More than 150 names appear on the list, representing large and more modest sums. The surnames of many French families that exist to this day can be found on that list: Legallet, Lalanne, Munier, Pon, Cazenave, Birsinger, Vorbe, Lacau, Bergez, Péninou, Trouillet, etcetera.

On June 23, 1912, Father Thiéry wrote to Father Sollier for permission to borrow \$25,000. With the pledge, he had already raised \$15,000 and hoped to double that amount when construction began. He argued that the price of



On May 18, 1913, Most Reverend Edward Hanna, Archbishop of San Francisco, blessed the cornerstone of the new church.

materials would soon increase by 10 percent due to the monumental construction plans for the Universal Exposition of 1915. He had to act fast – and he obtained the requested permission.

The interior plan of the old church was to be repeated, and after considering Father Barbier's idea to imitate the façade of St. Ambroise in Paris, a design had been submitted by Garin, a San Francisco architect. But the decision was made to do something entirely different and to use as a model for design, the façade of the basilica Notre Dame de Fourvière built in Lyon by Sainte-Marie Perrin and completed in 1894. The chief architect was

Pascal Brouchoud who came from Canada at the turn of the century, where his father had been an architect. He was assisted by his designer brother, Louis Brouchoud, and by an Italian, Atilio Moretti.

Construction took more than 3 years and the new church was solemnly dedicated on September 12, 1915 by the Most Reverend Edward Hanna who had become Archbishop of San Francisco in June of that year. Father Sollier had come for the occasion, and preached on the theme, "The Temple of God with Man, and Man with God." Making reference to the war that had been raging in France for over a year, he declared, addressing the Archbishop,



The grand organ of Notre Dame des Victoires was built in 1915 by the Johnston Organ and Piano Manufacturing Company.

"We are pleased to have you in our midst, for we realize that in blessing this church you have blessed not only the French Catholics of this diocese and the French colony of this city, but your blessing has gone out to all of our beloved France." Along with Archbishop Hanna, Father McMahon, the Dominican Provincial, and Father Connolly, Pastor of St. Paul's, officiated. Several French Sulpicians had come from Menlo Park, most notably, their Superior, Father Ayrinhac.

A brand new organ made by Johnston Organ and Piano Manufacturing Company of Los Angeles was featured at the ceremony. Incorporated in the construction are cabinetry and several pipes made from native California redwood. This instrument is noteworthy because of the beauty of the tone and the happy blending of instrument and acoustical environment.

The narrow, long, and high vaulting of the nave in the church contributes to the live resonance of the building and provides an ideal setting for this fine organ. Mr. Achille Artigues, organist at St. Mary's cathedral, played the organ on the dedication day of the new church. He was assisted by a splendid choir, consisting of five sopranos, two contraltos, three tenors, and two

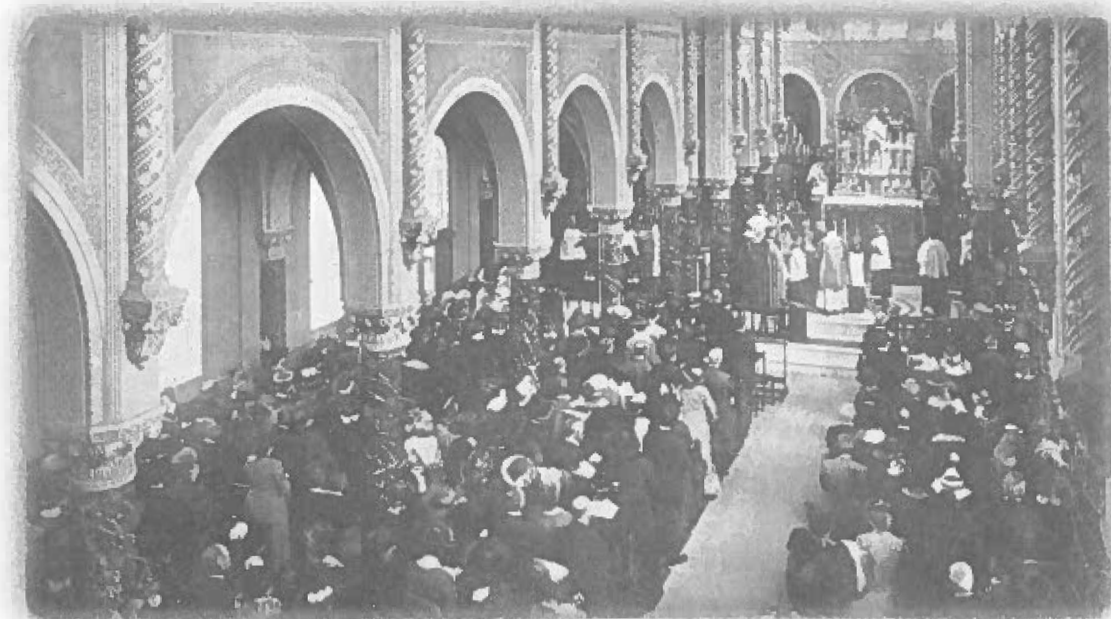


September 12, 1915.

The inauguration of Eglise Notre Dame des Victoires.

bassos. After the ceremony of dedication, a dinner was held in the hall which had served so long as the temporary church, and Mr. Camille Mailhebau of the firm of Bergez-Franks, caterers, was in charge of the banquet.

The *Monitor* writes that "on Monday morning, September 13, there was a solemn high Requiem Mass in the new church for the repose of the souls of the soldiers and sailors of France who have given their lives in the present European struggle. The church had



September 12, 1915.
Archbishop Hanna solemnly dedicated Notre Dame des Victoires.

been beautifully draped, and it is worthy of notice that the rich, though solemn, decorations had been furnished by Mr. Raphael Weill, one of San Francisco's best-known citizens, who, though not a Catholic, is nevertheless an affectionate and patriotic son of France, his native land." This Raphael Weill, of the Jewish faith, had established a large fashionable clothing store at the corner of Sutter and Grant Avenue called, "The White House."

The First World War had an enormous impact on the French colony of San Francisco. Many of the youth had gone to France to defend their native land and of these more than 600 young men, 120 never returned. Their names are inscribed on a plaque that was mounted in the church after 1918.

Sometime in 1915, a certain Miss Lucas Harvey who attended Notre Dame des Victoires regularly, bequeathed to the church, a sizeable portfolio of bonds and titles. The Archbishop advised that the portfolio be sold

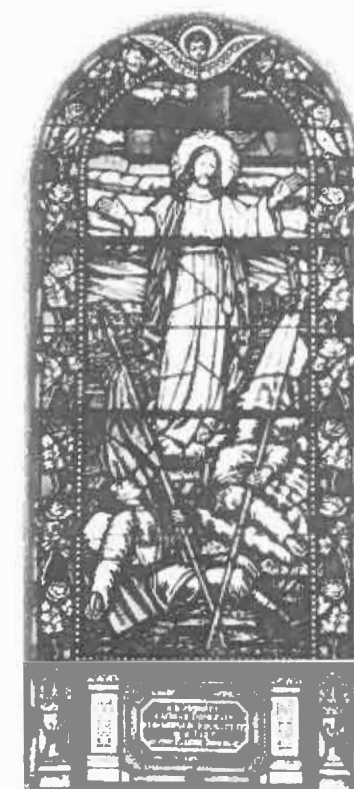
to pay off the church's debts, and to use any extra monies to purchase lots behind the parish on Pine Street. The Marists could build a school there.

Father Thiéry did just that. The new church had cost \$110,000 and the contractor, James McLaughlin was paid in full by early 1916. What's more, the Pastor was able to acquire three lots which cost \$40,000. He was just about to complete his 6-year term as Superior and was assigned to St. Louis Church in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1917. A young assistant who will figure prominently in the parish annals, Father Louis Le Bihan, S.M., had been assigned to the church in 1911. He was born in Paris, but had gone to study in Brittany, the region where his family had come from.

Upon completion of his novitiate in 1903, Le Bihan was sent to the United States for his seminary studies, since France had become the scene of a violent anti-clerical campaign. All religious orders have been banned. He had to



Left: The interior of Saint Ambroise Church, Paris after which the interior of Notre Dame des Victoires (Right) was modeled. 1915.



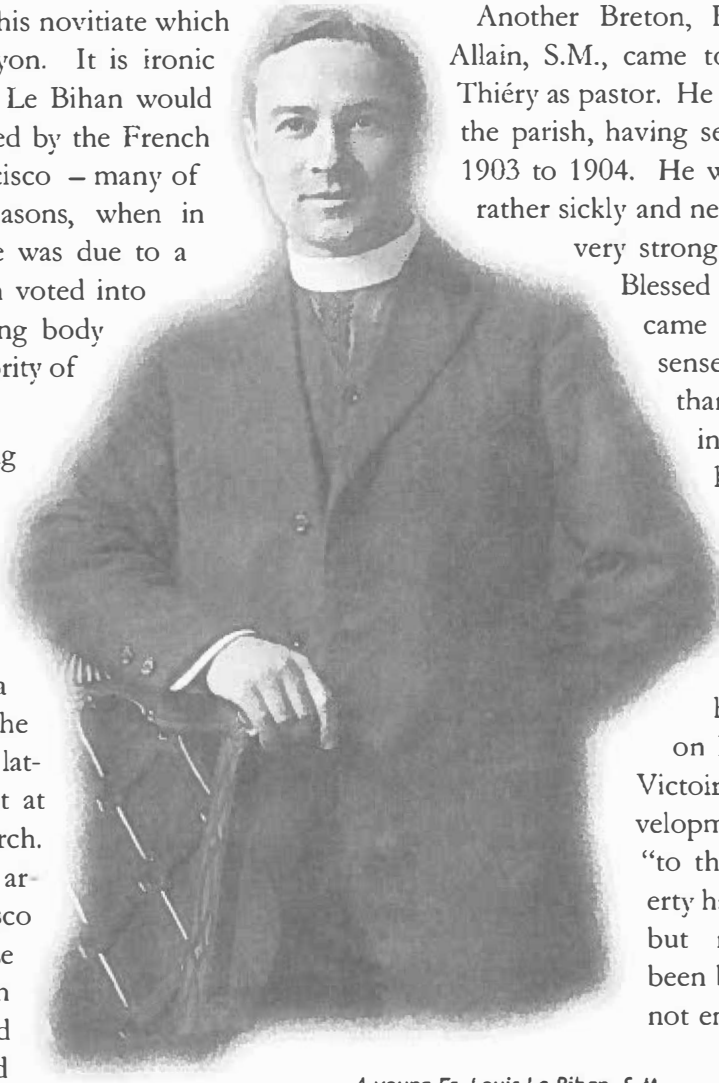
Left:
Stained glass window commemorating the sacrifice of American and French soldiers during World War I.



Right:
Stained glass window of the Nativity Scene.

go to Italy to finish his novitiate which he had begun in Lyon. It is ironic to note that Father Le Bihan would one day be welcomed by the French people of San Francisco – many of whom were Freemasons, when in fact, his earlier exile was due to a law which had been voted into effect by a governing body composed of a majority of Freemasons.

After completing his theological studies at Marist College in Washington, D.C., he was ordained in 1908 and sent to Atlanta as a Professor at the Marist College, and later as assistant priest at Sacred Heart Church. From the time he arrived in San Francisco in 1911, Father Le Bihan worked with young people, and Father Dagneau said of him, "His stature was short and robust, his manners boyish. Outdoor exercise was the essence of his life and because of his ability to play baseball, tennis, and such sports; he soon gathered about him the boys and young men of the colony. Many a day he led the youngsters on hikes into the country, or had a swimming party with them. His group was called the Joan of Arc Club. When World War I broke out, he prepared to serve his country. Departing from San Francisco, he reached as far as New York only to find that his boat had left the day before. At that, his Superior sent him back to continue his spiritual services to his countrymen in California."



A young Fr. Louis Le Bihan, S.M.

Another Breton, Father Benjamin Allain, S.M., came to replace Father Thiéry as pastor. He was familiar with the parish, having served there from 1903 to 1904. He was in his forties, rather sickly and neurotic, and had a very strong devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He came more out of a sense of obedience than by natural willingness. He had known Father Guibert who was still ministering and found it wrong that such sums had been spent on Notre Dame des Victoires while no development had gone on "to the south." Property had been acquired, but no church had been built. There were not enough funds. He even thought of selling the recently ac-

quired Pine Street property in order to generate some working capital. Archbishop Hanna, who hoped to see a school built there one day, did not find the plan to his liking. In any case, 1918 was not a good time to sell property because of the war and the epidemic, and so, Father dropped the idea. He took care of Father Guibert who was still subject to occasional epileptic seizures and admired Father Le Bihan whom he referred to as the "kingpin of the household." The new pastor despaired over the indifference of his parishioners compared to the strong faith of the Boston Catholics whom he had served for 16 years. His con-

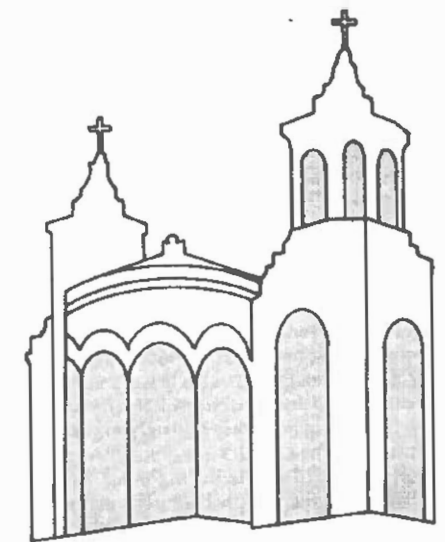
solation was a newly installed marble altar. It came from Salt Lake City where the Marists had recently closed their college which had functioned for over 30 years.

During the winter of 1918-1919, Father Allain was stricken with influenza and nearly died. He spent one month in the hospital and never really recovered, often experiencing insomnia and fatigue. His friend, Father Guibert, whose health was declining, had to leave and was replaced at St. Jeanne d'Arc by yet another Breton priest, Father François Helliet, S.M.

As a last straw, Father Allain had a confrontation with Archbishop Hanna over a seemingly futile matter. In early 1921, the Archbishop ordered a collection to be taken up in every church of his diocese for the purpose of aiding German and Austrian war orphans. We can comprehend Father Allain's dilemma: How could he ask the French people, whose native country had suffered for 4 years during the war with Germany, to contribute money to that country? But rather than go in person to Archbishop Hanna to explain this delicate situation and perhaps find a solution, he wrote back refusing "to take up a collection in our French church for the children of France's executioners." The Archbishop did not answer the letter, but simply asked the Provincial to replace Father Allain. Since his departure after only 3-1/2 years would have prompted some surprise, the pretext of his "poor health" was used, and the poor pastor left never having the truth of the matter brought to light. Years would pass before the true story was uncovered in the archives of the Society of Mary. It is to Father Allain's credit that he quietly accepted his transfer and never publicly mentioned the real reason for it. But it was with a broken heart that he went to St. Anne's parish in Lawrence, Massachusetts where he died the following year.

This brings us to 1921. The French church had had 15 pastors in 65 years – an average of 4 years per pastor. The history that was to follow would be different. For the next 36 years, two pastors would replace each other in turn. The two Bretons got along wonderfully and complemented each other. Most of the French people remember them affectionately: Father Louis Le Bihan and Father Henri Gérard.

THE FRENCH CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO



NOTRE DAME DES VICTOIRES

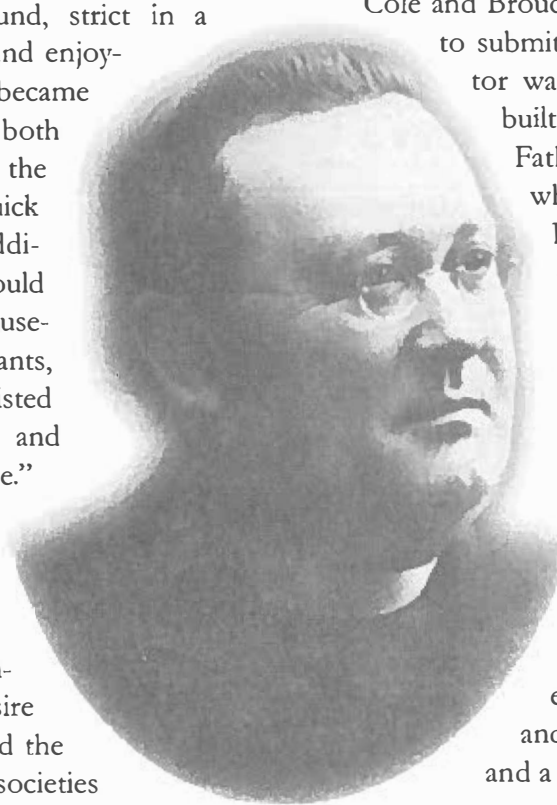


Chapter 5:

Father Le Bihan, S.M. and Father Gérard, S.M.: 1921-1957

After Father Allain left, it was thought that Father Louis Le Bihan S.M., who had been in San Francisco for 6 years, would be named pastor and superior. But Father de la Chapelle, S.M., Provincial Superior, considered him too young for the job: he was only 37 years old. Thus Father Henri Gérard, S.M., 11 years his senior, was appointed. Having come to the United States as a seminarian, Father Gérard had been ordained in 1895 in Washington, D.C., had taught for fifteen years at Jefferson College in Louisiana, and had become pastor of St Anne's Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Here is how Father Dagneau described him: "Short and rotund, strict in a way, but usually jolly and enjoying a witticism, he became quite popular with both the French people and the Americans. He was quick at noticing foibles or oddities, and his remarks would bring laughter and amusement. With his assistants, he was strict and insisted on religious discipline and maintaining of the rule." Upon arriving at the French parish, he was shocked by the small number of people who came to church on Sunday. Distances, the desire to "get rich quick," and the influence of secret societies



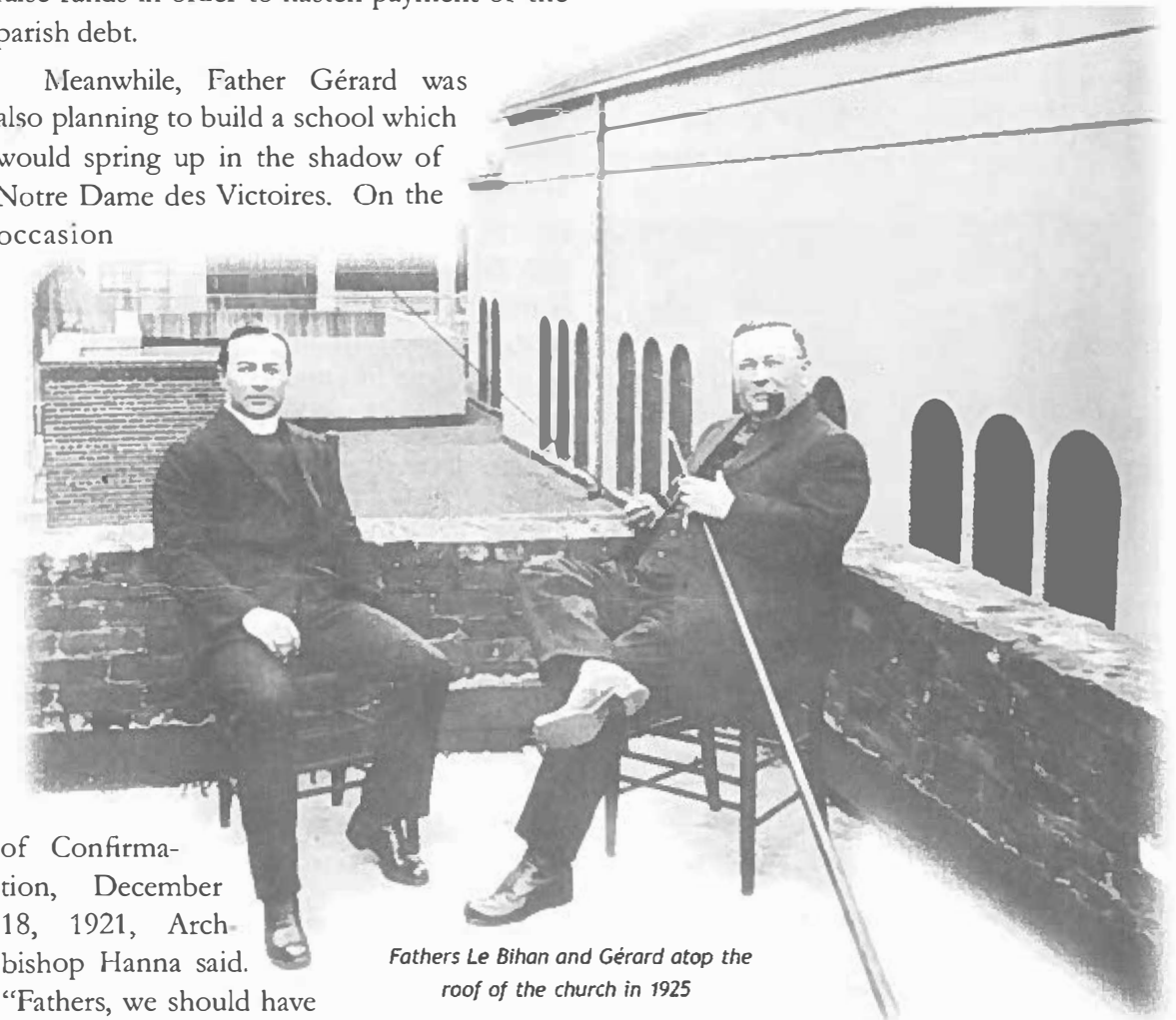
*Fr. Henri Gérard, S.M., Pastor,
1921-1927*

were the major factors contributing to this religious indifference. There were about 200 attendees at Sunday High Mass, and only on patriotic holidays was the church filled to capacity. Only one solution came to mind: the establishment of schools, both at the Bush Street parish and at St. Jeanne d'Arc's. But there was no available cash. He nevertheless decided to go ahead and begin with the Bay View district where the small chapel built in 1910 was no longer adequate for the 400 families it served. The Archbishop permitted the requested loan and it was decided to begin construction of a new chapel and school, to be built at Quesada Avenue and Lane Street. The architects, Cole and Brouchoud of Chico were asked to submit a design and the contractor was James McLaughlin, who built Notre Dame des Victoires. Father François Helliet, S.M., who served St Jeanne d'Arc Parish, followed the job very closely. It took over a year to complete. On July 9, 1922, Archbishop Hanna blessed the new building

which had cost \$43,000, including the price of the land. The building included a chapel, five classrooms and living space for the Sisters, and a room for the chaplain.

The school of the St. Jeanne d'Arc parish was a success from the very start. There were 65 students in 1922, 180 in 1923. Students had to be turned away. Father Gérard regretted not having envisioned a larger project, but the debt was sizeable and Father Helliet, quite worn out, left for Mexico. He was replaced by a Breton, Father François Georgelin, who had come to the United States as a seminarian and had been ordained in Washington, D.C. in 1908. He held bazaars and whist parties to raise funds in order to hasten payment of the parish debt.

Meanwhile, Father Gérard was also planning to build a school which would spring up in the shadow of Notre Dame des Victoires. On the occasion



of Confirmation, December 18, 1921, Archbishop Hanna said. "Fathers, we should have a school here, a school

where English would be taught of course, but where the children might also learn French. Let us establish here a center of French culture." It would be necessary to buy three lots to increase the area they already owned behind

the church: the cost would be \$23,500 which Father borrowed. He asked architects Cole and Brouchoud to draw up plans for a four-story building. Making use of the Pine Street slope, they built a gymnasium whose roof would reach the highest point of the upper lot. Above this was the auditorium, classrooms and conference rooms which could be rented out to the various French Associations which did not have places of their own. There were also living quarters for the teaching Sisters.

The Provincial came to San Francisco in 1923 to look the plans over and he approved them. The central building alone would cost \$160,000, an enormous sum at that time. The Archbishop guaranteed a loan of \$120,000,

and Father Gérard, agreed to raise the remainder within the French colony. The Consul General of France promised to obtain \$10,000 from the French government which had already donated \$8,000 toward St. Jeanne d'Arc School. James McLaughlin was hired again to carry out the construction. He had previously built the church in 1912-1915 and had just completed the building of St Jeanne d'Arc.

Father Gérard and Father Le Bihan, took it upon themselves to visit the French families to try and obtain their financial support,

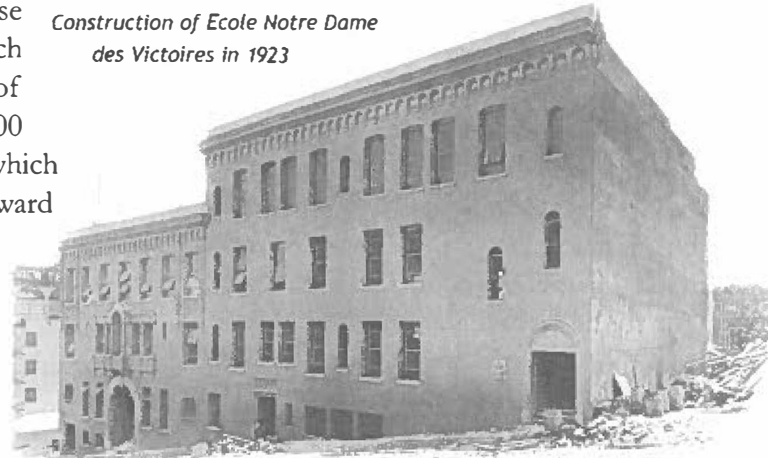


The School Gymnasium

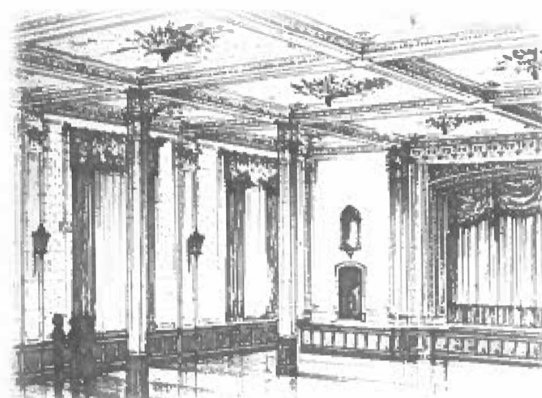
while continuing the whist parties and bazaars. The October bazaar alone bought in a \$5,000 profit. For a year now, an additional Mass was being celebrated at 12:30 P.M. and was attended by about a hundred people who worked nearby. It was followed by Benediction service. Father Gérard, had acquired a statue of St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus, who had just been beatified. Thus began the devotion to the "The Little Flower," and a shrine in her honor was added inside the church. Vigil offerings brought in \$7,000 in 1923. All of these seem very commercial, but they had to finance these new buildings somehow.

In October 1923 the gymnasium was com-

Construction of Ecole Notre Dame des Victoires in 1923



pleted. It measured 100 feet long, 58 feet wide and 21 feet high. A running track, built at the mezzanine level 10 feet above the ground, went around the hall between the wall and the supporting columns. A shower room was added. Above this, the Auditorium was nearly finished: it was 80 feet long, 60 feet wide and 20 feet high, and had a theater stage. It had a capacity of 500 and its entrance was on Pine Street. The school itself was built parallel to the street. It was named St. Joseph School, probably because it was to be staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, California. Included were a chapel, refectory, a dormitory for the Sisters, four classrooms, and eight more were added later. On January 14, 1924, the school opened its doors to its first students and assumed the name, Notre Dame des Victoires School. Only



Sketch of the School Auditorium, built by Architects, Cole and Brouchoud in 1924

14 students attended that day, but their numbers grew to 50 by June. When Archbishop Hanna came to bless the building on November 4, 1924, there were 150 students. A Mass was held at 9:00 A.M., followed by a special program in the brand new auditorium. The entire French colony realized that a new era had begun for their parish. School buses went out to the neighborhoods to pick up children who would attend kindergarten through the eighth grade, while awaiting the building that would serve as a high school. Upon completion a few years later, the total cost, including classroom and gym equipment, would amount to the enormous sum of \$340,000. It would take decades to pay off this debt. By 1932, the parish debt still amounted to \$250,000.

Fortunately, Fathers Gérard and Le Bihan worked well together. The latter became pastor and superior in 1927 when Father Gérard finished his 6-year term. Since the workload justified another priest, Father Julien Bouvy, S.M., a Parisian, was sent to assist them in 1925. He was to remain for 8 years until Father Charles Tracey, S.M., a native of Philadelphia, replaced him. At St. Jeanne d'Arc, Father Georgelin, S.M., was replaced by Father Constantin Chauve, S.M., from Lyon who remained for 11 years. Ordained in Washington, D.C., in 1902, he had been assigned as a professor at the college in Salt Lake City. He returned to France during the First World War and stayed until 1918, at the end of the War.

Father Dagneau wrote of him, "Father Chauve was an energetic man, never idle. His days and nights were devoted to his work. At noon each day, he came to Bush Street to eat dinner and to mingle with his confreres. When at times he seemed crestfallen, at Father Gérard's question: 'Why?' he would reply, 'Misère.' When affairs went worse, his answer would be, 'Misère noire.' This became a household word. But things prospered. He was a genius at col-

lecting money and building. A carpenter by nature, he built, over the years, several beautiful altars and a pulpit for St. Jeanne d'Arc Church."

He later went on to Paulina, Louisiana and built a new church to replace the one destroyed



Fr. Constantin Chauve, S.M., as a young soldier during the First World War. He lived to celebrate his 106th birthday

by fire. In December 1984, Father Chauve celebrated his 106th birthday! Unfortunately, he passed away on June 18, 1985.

At Notre Dame des Victoires, the school continued to prosper under the direction of Sister Mary Charles. June 1925 witnessed the first graduation of 11 students. In September, the enrollment was 316, and the first year of high school began under the direction of Sister Ignatia: there were 14 young ladies in the class. On December 1925, the school was visited by the new French Ambassador to the United States, the poet, Paul Claudel.

Archbishop Hanna came in December



Mother Charles of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, first Principal of Ecole Notre Dame des Victoires

1926 to bless the statue of St. Joseph that stood in a niche in the entry hall. We recall that at first, St. Joseph had been chosen as the school patron, but there were a great many schools and orphanages with the same name. The Archbishop himself suggested that the school bear the name of the parish church, Notre Dame des Victoires. Father Smith, S.M., the Provincial in Washington, also came to visit the school and sent a report to the Superior General when he found out that Father Gérard was holding card parties and "dance parties" in the parish hall to raise some money. He wrote at once to put a stop to those "frivolities" ("sauteries"). Father Gérard gave in, but not without pointing out that these gatherings were common-

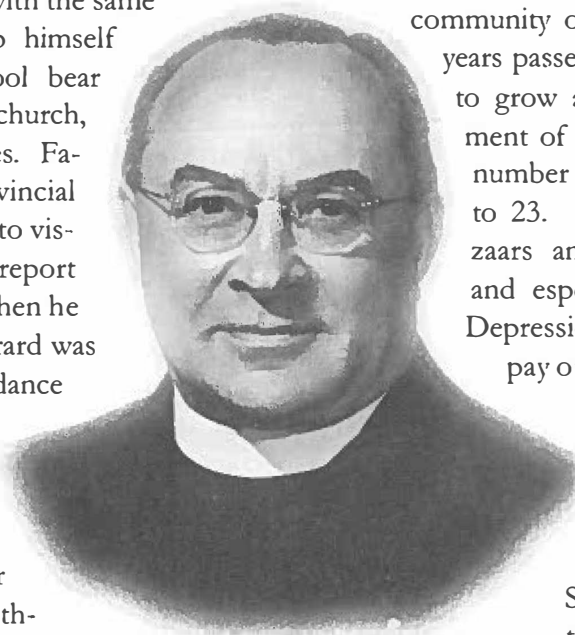
place in America and are of no consequence.

When Father Le Bihan became pastor on September 15, 1927, the school already had a chemistry and physics laboratory for the use of the high school students. There was a total enrollment of 430. To encourage the boys to grow in their religious faith, the new pastor founded the Junior Holy Name Society which met once a month. In 1928, he had a new shrine built in honor of St. Therese of Lisieux. This was really a chapel added on to the left side of the church as one faces the sanctuary. A confraternity was established. Its members met on Thursdays, attended Mass, and venerated the relics of the saint. Every month, a novena was held in honor of the "The Little Flower," and the church was filled to capacity at that time. Every year, on October 3, the feast of St. Therese, roses were given out to those who came to the ceremonies which concluded with solemn Benediction.

On November 18, 1929, the French Consul General awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor to Father Gérard in tribute to the many services he had rendered to the French

community of San Francisco. The years passed, the school continued to grow and reached an enrollment of 500 in 1931, while the number of religious increased to 23. In spite of all the bazaars and whist tournaments, and especially because of the Depression, they were unable to pay off the debt. On June 4,

1933, Father Le Bihan celebrated his silver jubilee: he had spent 22 of his 25 years of ministry in San Francisco. Toward the end of that year, he regretfully witnessed



Fr. Louis Le Bihan, S.M., Pastor, 1927-1957

the departure of Mother Joseph of the Helpers of the Holy Souls on Haight Street. For over 12 years, she had devoted herself to the parish, guiding the Children of Mary, the Club Notre Dame de France, and the catechism classes. Father Gérard had completed his 6th year as superior, was re-elected, and Father Le Bihan remained as pastor. Several assistant priests came and went during the period of 1933-1936. One of them, Father Dagneau, was a native San Franciscan. His successor, Father Henri George, S.M., had spent 40 years in Louisiana and would remain with the French parish until his death in 1949.

To aid young people in their religious practice, several organizations were created by Father Le Bihan; thus the Young Ladies' Institute, under the name, "Our Lady of Lourdes, Number 20," was founded in 1938. Its members assembled twice a month. A fraternal order of Catholic men, the Young Men's Institute, existed in San Francisco and Father Le Bihan asked them to open a chapter at the French parish. It came to be known in 1941 as, "San Francisco Council No. 1." They held meetings twice a month. At the school, the Mothers' Guild had been active for several years. They helped the parish pay its debt and provided some equipment, such as a movie projector and a piano for the auditorium. Little by little, Father Le Bihan managed to reduce the debt undertaken in 1924 by about \$15,000, which meant that it would take many more years to pay it off completely. Meanwhile, he had to repaint the interior of the church in 1942 and update the electric lighting, all of which meant additional expense.

In 1942, a young assistant was assigned to Notre Dame des Victoires, Father Julian Marquis, S.M., who we shall hear more of later since he is destined to become a pastor. He replaced Father John McGoldrick, S.M., who for 4 years, had charge of the school boys until he

was assigned to Louisiana. Meanwhile, Father Le Bihan became superior once again; Father Gérard had held that position for 6 years.

The entry of the United States into World War II inspired Father Le Bihan to organize a prayer crusade each day after the 10:30 a.m. Mass. Collections were taken up by parishioners and the school children. Books and religious articles were sent to the missionaries in the Pacific who had lost everything during the Japanese onslaught in the Solomon Islands. The arrival in port of the French vessel, "Free France," was always an occasion for a show of patriotic fervor, as were the 14th of July and 11th of November, with official Masses celebrated for the intention of French and American soldiers who had lost their lives on the battlefield.

Father Gérard's health had given cause for worry over the past several years. He was hospitalized and told to rest. He celebrated his Golden Jubilee on June 18, 1945. Hospitalized once again in December 1947, he died on June 8, 1949, at the age of 76, two days before the end of the school year. The school that he had founded now had 546 students in the primary grades and 96 high school students. A huge crowd attended his funeral. He was buried in Holy Cross Cemetery. The French recall his fine sermons, his continuous presence in the confessional, and his undertaking of the construction of Notre Dame des Victoires School. Father Dagneau adds: "There is still another gift that Father Gérard added to the Catholic Church in California, one that is not so conspicuous or so widely known. That is his dynamic and successful efforts in reviving the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, California. Their number had dwindled to less than a dozen, when Father Gérard became interested and began rebuilding the community. Today (in 1963), they number in the hundreds and have schools and hospitals, extending from

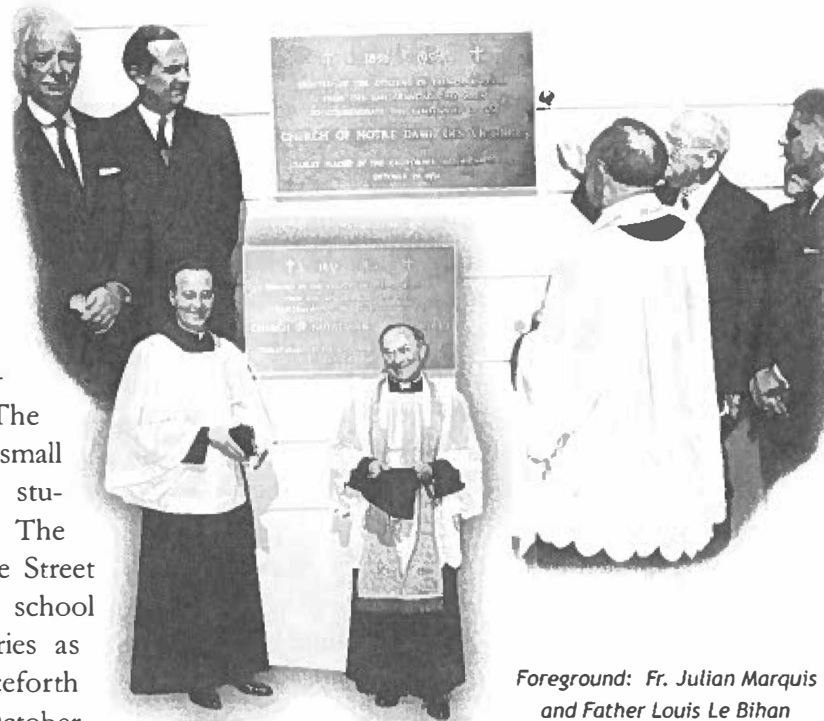
Orange in the southern part of the State up to Eureka, near the Oregon border. The Sisters have looked upon him as their co-founder, and have shown their gratitude by bestowing upon him their tender care in the last few months of his mortal life."

In the same year, 1949, Father Anthony Chouinard, S.M., a French Canadian born in St. Paul, came as assistant to Notre Dame des Victoires. On September 26, 1949, work began on a new convent for the Sisters. The parish had owned the property for some time, but had rented it out as a parking lot while putting together the necessary funds. The 22 teaching sisters lived in small common quarters, and the students needed more space. The new building erected on Pine Street was a continuation of the school building and have four stories as well. Each sister would henceforth have her own room. On October 8, 1950, John J. Mitty, Archbishop of San Francisco, came to bless the new convent and the remodeled classrooms for the 115 high school students on the top floor of the school, formerly the sisters' quarters. And on June 25, 1951, Father Robert Hurst, S.J., was ordained, the first school alumnus to become a priest. He celebrated his first Mass at Notre Dame des Victoires. It was also in 1951 that the annual parish bazaar came to be known as, "Le Bal de Paris," which up to this day, is one of the principal sources of revenue for the church and school. Parishioners and school parents alike collaborate toward its success.

Father Julian Marquis, who had gone to

France in 1951 to teach and to perfect his French returned in 1953. He had been temporarily replaced by Father Emile Neyron, S.M., who in turn returned to France. Father

On October 19, 1956, Fr. Le Bihan blessed the bronze plaque marking the Centennial of Notre Dame des Victoires donated by the California Historical Society. (Left) Dr. Raoul Blanquié and Mr. Robert Luc, Consul General of France, (Right) California Historical Society President, Joseph K. Knowland, and French Parliament member, Robert Burion



Marquis was named superior and Father Le Bihan remained as pastor of the parish. On May 7, 1954, he inaugurated the Blessed Sacrament Society with 15 members. The aim and purpose of this group was to increase devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. These ladies devoted their time to the altar linens and other necessary works within the church. Its first president was Mrs. Irene Leutza, and the Society had 200 members two years later. Father Le Bihan became seriously ill in December 1954. He underwent surgery followed by a long convalescence in Orange, and returned to San Francisco on Easter 1955 without having completely recovered.

The year 1956 marked the Centennial of Notre Dame des Victoires Church. On October 18, a great banquet was held at the Sheraton Palace. On Friday, a solemn novena began, led by Father Edward Donzé, S.M., Vice-Provincial of the Marist Fathers. On Saturday, the 19th, under the auspices of the California Historical Society, there was the placing of the Bronze Centennial Marker on the church. The students of Notre Dame des Victoires High School and Grammar School did their part in the celebration by presenting a program on Thursday, the 25th, entitled, "Centurama." This commemorative pageant reenacted the outstanding events and activities of the school since its foundation in 1924. The solemn Mass of Thanksgiving was held on Sunday, the 28th, with His Excellency, The Most Reverend Hugh A. Donohoe, Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco, presiding. Doctor Raoul Blanquié was president of the Centennial Committee and the French government offered the statue of the Virgin which still stands near the rectory entrance. This statue of Mary was created in Paris by Jean-Pierre Duroux and Father Julian Marquis said that, "It was a testimony of all Catholics, especially French Catholics, of their devotion to the Blessed Mother."

During the summer of 1957, Father Le Bihan went to France, but when he returned in September, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. The Sisters of St. Joseph took care of him at their hospital in Orange, but he had a relapse and went into a coma on December 5. He died the next morning without ever regaining consciousness. All throughout that week, the sisters, novices, and postulants, many of whom were former pupils at Notre Dame des Victoires, kept vigil. On Tuesday, December 10, Father Joseph Munier of St. Patrick's Seminary gave the eulogy. A public address system was set up in the church hall so as to permit the crowds to follow the chant of the Mass, and to hear the sermon. When Father Le Bihan's

casket was carried from the church, a guard of honor was formed along the stairs and in front of the church by the students of Notre Dame des Victoires School. Burial was at Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma.

Father Le Bihan was always tremendously popular, not only in the French colony of San Francisco, but also among all San Franciscans. The diocesan clergy, from the Archbishop down, held him in very high esteem. The secret of his popularity was his apostolic zeal, along with his great simplicity and a highly developed sense of sympathy and understanding. There was a certain spontaneity and naiveté in his character that made him an easy confidant. This same characteristic explains his success with the youth until the end of his life. Many sought him out with their spiritual problems and his solid French spirituality was the source of their direction through many years. Though he came to the United States when he was only 19, he was first of all a Frenchman and Breton.

We cannot conclude the chapter on Fathers Le Bihan and Gérard without relating a well-known incident that happened to Father Gérard, but was somehow attributed to Father Le Bihan. Every Christmas, Father Gérard used to arrange the stable of Bethlehem, the crib with the Infant Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the animals. One day following Christmas, he went up to the crib and noticed that the Child Jesus was missing. He searched high and low in the church and sacristy, but nowhere could the statue be found. Then he proceeded to look into the vestibule and, finally, he went out to Bush Street. There, coming up the hill, he spied a little Italian boy dragging a wagon in which reposed the Infant. Father rushed up to him, took the statue and began to scold the boy for stealing the statue. The little fellow wondered what all the excitement was about. He replied, "I do not steal

the bambino. I promise him if he give me a tle red wagon for Christmas, I give him a ride in it. Now I give him a ride.”

The story was picked up by a woman reporter who wrote a touching story about it in an Eastern paper. The writers for the television show, “Dragnet,” found the story and traced the event to Notre Dame des Victoires. They asked Father Le Bihan’s permission to reproduce it and asked him to supervise the filming, and they promised to pay all the expenses

and give him a bonus and a copy of the film. Father Le Bihan went to Los Angeles to do this. For convenience, the location was shifted from the French Church in San Francisco to the Mexican Church near Union Station in Los Angeles. Father Le Bihan later mentioned that they treated him nicely and fulfilled their promises, except for sending him a copy of the film. Sometime during Christmas week, you might still see this interesting episode on television.



On October 25, 1956, Notre Dame des Victoires celebrated its 100th Anniversary at the Sheraton Palace Hotel

Chapter 6: The Recent Years: 1958-2004

After Father Le Bihan’s death, Father Julian Marquis was named pastor. This was the first time since the founding of Notre Dame des Victoires 102 years previously that the chief administrator of the parish was not a priest born in France. Although Father Marquis was of French extraction, he had spoken French only until the age of five. He had been born in Wisconsin on February 9, 1916, the eldest son of a family of 11 children. He had been educated in Minneapolis and then at the Marists’ minor seminary in Pennel, near Philadelphia. He was sent to France to study Theology at the major seminary of the Marist Fathers in Lyon. Unfortunately, the Second World War broke out on September 1939 and he was forced, as an American citizen, to return to his country. He completed his studies in Washington, D.C., where he was ordained a priest in June 1941.



Fr. Julian Marquis, S.M., Pastor, 1958-1964

After an initial assignment in San Francisco as an assistant, he returned to France in August 1950 for 2 years of study at a Marist College in Riom in the Auvergne region in order to perfect his knowledge of French. He made his second novitiate in Rome and came back to San Francisco in 1953.

When he was assigned as pastor in January 1958, this timid man was afraid that he was not up to the task. But he was soon aware of the affection and esteem that his parishioners held for him. The main personality traits which emerge from his portrait are his kindness and respect for others. While he certainly had convictions and ideas of his own, he never imposed them on others, but simply presented them. He rarely spoke about himself and was generous to a fault. In 1962, he was offered the position of Provincial which he thought he could fulfill while remaining pastor. He encountered some serious problems and had to make many exhausting trips and was finally obliged to relinquish his responsibilities as Provincial. This was in early August 1964, but it was too late. In view of the condition of his heart, surgery was his only hope. But right after his operation, which appeared to have been successful, he passed away on October 28 of that year. A huge crowd attended his funeral, Father John McGoldrick delivered the eulogy, from which the following excerpt typifies Father Marquis:

“Constantly on Father Marquis’ tongue was his interest and solicitude for all those who passed through his hands and who are even now trying, even the hard way, to make their way in this rugged world.”

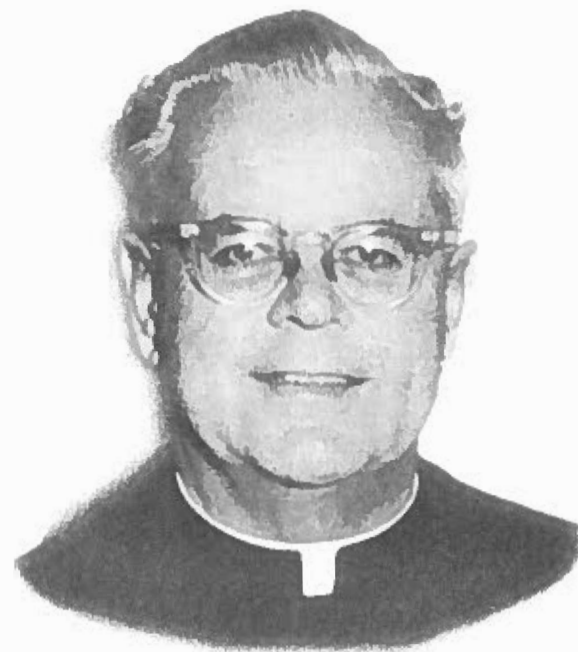
Father Marquis had two assistant priests: Father James Marchant, S.M., and Father Emile Neyron, S.M., who had come from France in 1957. The latter founded the adult choir in November 1958, to sing at the 10:30 a.m. French Mass on Sundays. The French choir still continues to sing and in 1983, celebrated its 25th anniversary with some of its founding members still active participants. Unfortunately, Mr. Charles Shatto, the parish organist of over 25 years who devoted so much of time and talent to the choir, died just shortly before the silver anniversary celebration of the choir.

During this same time, the "Father Le Bihan Memorial Fund" was established in honor of the priest who was so instrumental in opening the Marist Seminary in San Rafael, Marin County, in 1955. The endowments were to be used to pay for the education of young Frenchmen who were preparing to become priests. The Marists had acquired an eight-and-a-half acre of land complete with a boys' school of nine buildings. Later, a chapel, dining rooms, and a kitchen were added. Father Le Bihan enjoyed going there from time to time and he occasionally invited the staff to come to Notre Dame des Victoires. Unfortunately, the seminary was closed in 1962 due to a lack of students. The few young men who wished to enter the priesthood would later attend St. Peter Chanel Seminary in Berkeley instead.

In September 1959, construction of a new school cafeteria was completed. It was located on the former boys' recreation courtyard which was moved to the roof of the new cafeteria that was below ground level. It had cost about \$100,000, a third of which was furnished by the Fathers' Guild, a third by the parish, and a third by the school parents and friends of Notre Dame des Victoires. It was blessed on January 18, 1960, and named the "Father Le Bihan Memorial Cafeteria."

The church hall, which dated from 1907,

no longer conformed to safety regulations, and was completely renovated in August 1960. The stage at one end of the hall was removed, the kitchen was remodeled, and cupboards were installed. An acoustical ceiling and a new heating system were added. The hall was freshly painted, the floor retiled, and it was made suitable for the many large banquets held there that were sponsored by a variety of organizations, such as the Blessed Sacrament Society, the Archiconfrérie, the Lourdes Institute, the Mothers' and Fathers' Guilds.



Fr. James Marchant, S.M., Pastor, 1965-1968

In 1963, the Marists commemorated the centenary of their arrival in the United States. They retraced the path of that long adventure, from February 2, 1863 when Fathers Henri Belanger, S.M., and Joseph Gautherin, S.M., left France for Louisiana where they took charge of St. Michael's Parish in Convent. One hundred years later, there were 276 Marists in America spread out over three provinces: Washington, Boston, and San Francisco.

Father Marquis' sudden death reminded them, however, that no growth can take place without a certain amount of pain and hardship. A successor was not immediately appointed and Father James Marchant, S.M., superior of the community in San Francisco, managed Notre Dame des Victoires Parish from January 1965 until he was officially named pastor several months later. He was born the son of an English father and an Irish mother. He entered the Marist Order in 1933 and was ordained a priest on June 9, 1940. He served as a military chaplain in France and in Germany, was pastor of Holy Cross Church in Kalaheo, Hawaii, and came to Notre Dame des Victoires in 1957. There he celebrated his silver jubilee in 1965. His assistants were Fathers Emile Neyron, S.M., and James Johnston, S.M., who was replaced by Father Edward Donzé, S.M., in September 1966. Although Father Donzé was born in the United States of Alsatian parents; he understood French perfectly.



The Basilica of Fourvière in Lyon, France. This building was the inspiration for the Notre Dame des Victoires 1915 design

On Sunday, October 30, 1966, the entire parish joined the Marists of San Francisco in commemorating the 150th anniversary of the taking of vows by the first band of young priests with Jean-Claude Colin at the basilica of Fourvière in Lyon. The new community received official recognition 20 years later in

1836, but 1816 had always been considered the founding date of the Marist Order, whose members serve the Church under the auspices of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Fr. Emile Neyron, S.M., Pastor, 1968-1975

Various changes in Notre Dame des Victoires took place at this time: the old wooden doors of the church were replaced by glass ones. The rectory, which dated from 1907, was renovated. The brick garden wall was removed; the building itself was enlarged to include two more rooms and a large dining room. The old part of the building was refurbished, equipped with an elevator, and you might say that all that remained of the old rectory were the four walls and the roof. The final cost exceeded \$100,000, of which a portion had to be borrowed. The balance of the debt was paid off many years later in June 1985.

During the construction period between July 1968 and April 1969, the community moved to 544 Bush Street where the "Marist Center" was located.

In 1968, Father Emile Neyron was named pastor of the parish, with Fathers Leonard

Ferringo, S.M., and Edward Donzé as assistants. Father Ferringo became Provincial of the San Francisco Marists in August 1969, and was replaced at the parish by Father James Pratt, S.M. The following year, Father Paul Flynn, S.M., replaced Father Donzé and both Father Neyron and Father Pratt celebrated their silver jubilee in the priesthood. Father Pratt became pastor of All Hallows Church, Father Herbert Merzbach, S.M., took his place in Notre Dame des Victoires, and Father Ferringo became the superior of the community. Within 3 years' time, there had been more turnover than during the period when Fathers Gérard and Le Bihan alternated positions as pastor and superior.

This was due to circumstances rather than to human issues. The French colony was aging without having renewed its population because families were having fewer children and immigration had all but ceased. The standard of living had improved in France, giving fewer reasons for emigration. Moreover, the United States was having trouble regulating the influx of recent immigrants from Mexico and Asia, and made immigration procedures more difficult for Europeans as well. While in the 1920s, some 70 baptisms and 100 weddings took place each year at Notre Dame des Victoires, their number had dropped by two-thirds a half-century later. Only funeral services were held at a high rate, which is not a sign of vitality for a parish.

The Church itself was in crisis: vocations had diminished; many religious reverted to lay status. While there had been as many as 25 religious at Notre Dame des Victoires school before the Second World War, their number had tragically decreased and there were by then but five or six. The high school was closed in 1970. The elementary school took over the vacated classroom space and continued to function with a lay person as its principal.

Maintenance expenses continued to be high. The cafeteria roof leaked and needed replacing beneath the recreation court. Earthquake-safety regulations required that all of the school windows be replaced and, as a result, the adjacent walls, inside and out, had to be patched and painted. The parish, still in debt, had to borrow money once again to pay a bill that exceeded \$100,000. The church itself was in need of a new paint job in June and July of 1973.

In the meantime, Father Paul Flynn, was appointed to Nampa, Idaho as pastor and was replaced at Notre Dame des Victoires by Father Michael Larkin, who joined him in Idaho a year later. A very young assistant, Father Henry Perez, S.M., took his place. The parish team was completed by Brother Joseph Grima, S.M. in January 1974, and by Father Edward Blee, S.M., in March 1975.

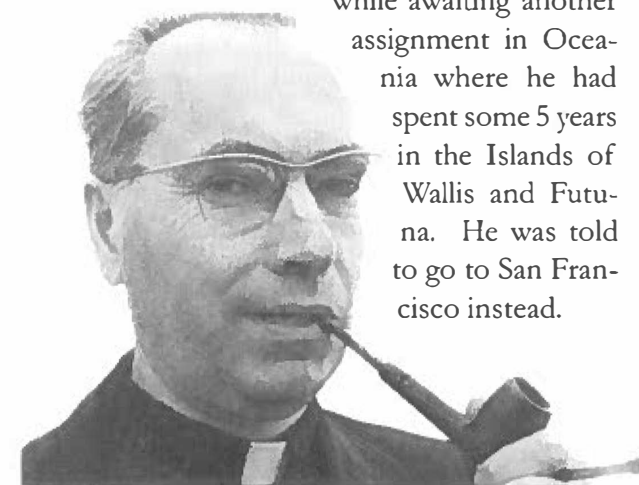


Fr. Leonard Ferringo, S.M., Pastor, 1975-1983

When Father Neyron left Notre Dame des Victoires in June 1975, Father Ferringo became its pastor. The lack of vocations over the previous 15 years was being felt in France, too, and it seemed that it would be impossible

to find a priest to come from the "old country" when the Society of Mary there was having to decide which parish, which college to close down for lack of personnel. The French community in San Francisco took steps to contact the Superior General of the Marist Order in Rome, because they felt that they really needed a French-born priest at their parish.

It happened that Father Etienne Siffert, S.M., was on leave visiting his family in France while awaiting another assignment in Oceania where he had spent some 5 years in the Islands of Wallis and Futuna. He was told to go to San Francisco instead.



Fr. Etienne Siffert, S.M., Pastor, 1st term: 1983-1991

Father Etienne Siffert was born in Paris in 1931. His family was obliged to leave their home when the German troops arrived in Paris in May 1940. With his brother, he went to Lyon, where one of his cousins was then Principal of a Catholic school staffed by the De la Salle Brothers. After a year, he went to Monluçon in the middle of France, where his mother was born, and he attended a Marist School where his uncles had also been educated.

After the war, in 1946, he returned to Paris and attended another Marist school, Notre Dame de Bury. In 1950, he entered the novitiate of the Society of Mary, made his profession in 1951, and was ordained a priest on June 6, 1958. He wanted to go to the missions, but

since he had a teaching license from the Sorbonne University of Paris, his superiors asked him to stay in France, where he taught French, Latin, and Greek in different Marist schools.

In 1959, the Bishop of Wallis and Futuna in the South Pacific was looking for a Marist who could be superintendent of schools in the islands, and Father Siffert accepted his offer. Father Siffert resided in Wallis but had to take either a boat or a plane to travel to and from Futuna, the island where St. Peter Chanel was martyred in 1841. Father Siffert traveled between the islands to fulfill his various responsibilities, such as building new schools, supervising all operations, training teachers, etcetera. He was on a leave after a term in Oceania when he was presented this offer. And it was thus that after his vacation in France, he arrived in San Francisco on that November evening in 1975 with much to learn about parish life, being previously involved exclusively in teaching.

The years that followed were uneventful. Father Henry Perez, S.M., left for St. Matthew's Parish in Phoenix, Arizona in July 1976, and the following year, Father Merzbach, S.M., left for San Diego. Father Merle Fisher, S.M., came to serve as assistant but was reassigned to St. Paul's in Nampa, Idaho in August 1979. Soon it was Father Blee's turn to leave the parish when he was transferred to Phoenix.

August 22, 1982, marked the Centennial of the arrival of the Marist priests in California in 1882 when they attempted to establish a seminary for the Archdiocese of San Francisco at Mission San Jose. The seminary was abandoned in 1884 because of a lack of students and the Archdiocese of San Francisco had to wait until 1898 to open another seminary when the Sulpicians agreed to staff St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park. And so, it was not until 1985 that we could celebrate the true centennial of the Marist Fathers with their arrival at

Notre Dame des Victoires in 1885.

In August of 1983, Father Ferringo, S.M., who was pastor and superior of the Marist community since 1975, was reassigned as pastor of All Hallows Church in the Bayview district of San Francisco. He had been very dedicated to the French Church and the school, working extensively to renovate the rectory and taking an active interest in the Parish Council, the Mothers' Guild, the Fathers' Club, and many other organizations of the parish. Father Etienne Siffert then became pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires and Father John Sullivan, S.M., became associate pastor, serving with Father Michael Galinada, S.M., and Brother Joseph Grima, S.M.

Ordained a priest in 1965, Father Sullivan was no stranger to Notre Dame des Victoires. His family's history at the French Church spanned 100 years. His great-grandfather, Pierre Bordenave, born in France, and Catherine Carol, also born in France, were married by Abbé Robert in 1881. His grandfather, François Bordenave, was baptized at the French Church and married Maria White in 1903 when Father Guibert was pastor. Their daughter, Eleonore Bordenave, was baptized and married at Notre Dame des Victoires by Father Le Bihan and it was in the same church that Father John Sullivan was baptized. After his ordination, he was assigned associate pastor in Hawaii and later became pastor of All Hallows Church from 1977 to 1983.

It had been the hope that the parish team

would remain stable for several years, but a lack of vocations had been having its effect on the Province. In August 1984, Father Galinada and Brother Grima were assigned to the seminary in Berkeley. Neither could be replaced at the parish where there would henceforth be only two priests.

Before becoming pastor, Father Siffert spent most of his time with the French community – teaching catechism in two lycées, visiting the sick at the French Hospital and different senior residences, performing weddings and baptisms, presiding at funerals, and the French Masses. In 1976-77 he had gone to Notre Dame des Victoires School to learn English, and sat many times in class with the second grade children. At the beginning, the students thought he was coming to observe the teaching, after a while, they discovered that he did not speak English and wondered if he was not a little retarded!

Fr. Etienne Siffert, S.M., Pastor, 2nd term: 1993-2004

Running a parish was something new for the pastor who was not aware of many details even after being with Notre Dame des Victoires for 8 years. He was astonished to discover that there was little money in the bank and that there was an outstanding debt that would take 2 years to repay. And then there was work to be done: in the church, the organ needed to be restored by replacing the bellows and eight units of wind chests and wind lines; in

the church hall, a new tile floor and new draw drapes had to be installed as well as a brand new dish washing machine and two ovens in the kitchen, all necessary to accommodate the many dinners that take place in the hall. Fortunately, Father Sullivan was a great help to the new pastor with these material improvements.

In 1984, some Supervisors of the City of San Francisco were chagrined to see many old buildings located in the downtown area being demolished and replaced by skyscrapers, and they wanted to preserve as many of the old buildings still standing as possible. So, the Planning, Housing, and Development Committee of San Francisco published a list of buildings to be declared historical landmarks and Notre Dame des Victoires church was on that list. Father Siffert consulted the Archdiocese which was then opposed to this because, once a church was designated as a landmark, every restoration, repair, or improvement would have to be submitted to the City for approval resulting in increased costs. It would also be difficult to sell the property if the Archdiocese chose to. All the churches belonged to the Archbishop with the exception of St. Ignatius and St. Dominic. The Notre Dame des Victoires Parish Council was in favor of the landmark designation, and some of the parishioners went to the hearing to express their wishes. Finally, on Monday, August 27, 1984, the Board of Supervisors decided by a 9-to-1 vote that Notre Dame des Victoires Church would be designated as a historical landmark.

Meanwhile, at the school, it was an unfortunate reality that some parents could not afford to pay the school tuition for their children. Father Siffert talked to Mrs. Diane Guay, the school principal, and together, they decided to redevelop the Scholarship Fund which by then was depleted and had become dormant, although it had existed for years. Thanks to different fundraisers such as dinners, art shows

in downtown galleries, "buffets campagnards," etcetera, all of which involved parishioners and parents, this Scholarship Fund grew substantially and still exists.

Mrs. Guay resigned as principal in 1987 to become the Director of Education of the College of Notre Dame, Belmont. A steering committee composed of parishioners and parents was formed to interview several candidates and it was the 6th grade teacher, Mrs. Mary Ghisolfo, who was selected to become principal and who (as of the date of this writing), is still running the school after 19 years.

The parish and school continued to work together. When Pope John Paul II came to San Francisco in September 1987, the parish and school worked together again to welcome the Holy Father. Another example of this parish-school cooperation was the *Renew* program started in 1988 by the Archdiocese. For 2 years, groups of parents and parishioners met together for community prayer, reflection, and scripture study under the guidance of Father Joseph Robeck, S.M., who was then in residence at Notre Dame des Victoires and who was also in charge of the Third Order of Mary.

In the late 1980s, there were assignment and position changes among the priests. Father John Sullivan was assigned pastor of All Hallows Church in 1987 after 4 years at Notre Dame des Victoires. He was replaced by Father George Fahey, S.M., who had spent 30 years as a missionary in New Guinea and Papua. Father Fahey left in 1988 to become chaplain at St. Lucy's Priory in Glendora, California and was replaced on July 31, 1988, by Father Phillip d'Auby, S.M., who had been in different parishes in Hawaii and, most recently, in campus ministry in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Everything was going smoothly until the afternoon of Tuesday, October 17, 1989, when a major earthquake struck Northern Califor-

nia, knocking out power, starting fires, collapsing buildings, freeways, and a section of the Bay Bridge. The rolling quake along the notorious San Andreas Fault struck just before 5:15 p.m. Mass and lasted about 15 seconds. Its magnitude was estimated between 7.0 and 7.1 on the Richter Scale.

Fortunately, no damage was done to the church. A priest was in the confessional which was shaking so violently that the penitent left in a hurry without receiving absolution. The Mass was celebrated at 5:15 p.m. as usual; some candles were lit and brought to the altar since there was no electricity, and after Mass, everybody left the Church without suspecting that anything tragic had happened.

It was only after dinner that we heard through the radio that several fires were burning in the downtown area; a city block in the Marina district was in flames; and some cars were trapped beneath a collapsed section of the Bay Bridge that links San Francisco and Oakland. In the school, two windows in the auditorium were broken and some small bits of plaster had fallen from the balcony ceiling. After an inspection by the City Building Department, the school reopened after 2 days of closure. The Church was never closed.

Two months after the earthquake, the Department of City Planning of San Francisco started a program to identify buildings that are in danger of collapsing in a future earthquake. In 1990, it was learned that Notre Dame des Victoires – along with Old St. Mary's, and eight other Catholic churches, four schools, and two convents – was one of the 2,100 brick buildings in San Francisco considered to be hazardous to life unless it was reinforced and retrofitted.

The Archdiocese sent structural engineers to each "unreinforced masonry building" (UMB) to evaluate what should be done and to estimate how much it would cost to retrofit

them. Notre Dame des Victoires' estimated cost of \$3 million, and the total cost of retrofitting all the churches in the Archdiocese was estimated at \$50 million. We were told by the Archdiocese that they could not contribute any money to the UMBs, and that each parish would have to raise the money themselves. If this was not feasible, then the church could be closed.

Fr. Siffert decided to start an Earthquake Fund immediately, knowing it would take a long time to raise \$3 million. He communicated the seriousness of the situation to the French community. Even with the donations bequeathed towards the maintenance of the church by parishioners on their demise, it would not be enough for the retrofitting of the church. He told them, "If we have to close Notre Dame des Victoires Church, you can not be buried where you were baptized and married. If in your last will and testament you give everything to some nephew in France, he will pay huge taxes and the French Church will not profit from it. In newspaper obituaries, ask your friends to send a donation to the NDV Earthquake Fund in lieu of flowers, etcetera." This statement caused the parishioners to think and resulted in donations gradually made to the Earthquake Fund.

The normal term of a pastor and superior is 6 years; but by 1991, Father Siffert had been pastor and superior for 8 years because there had been no one available to replace him. In August 1991, Father James Pratt, S.M., who was then 73 years old, agreed to come to Notre Dame des Victoires as pastor with Fathers Siffert and d'Auby as assistants.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1918, Father Pratt attended the Marist College in Atlanta, made his profession in the Society of Mary in 1941, and was ordained a priest in 1946 in Washington, D.C. He was a seminary teacher and an assistant in many Marist parishes in

Louisiana, Idaho, Hawaii, and California until he became pastor at St. Paul church in Nampa, Idaho in 1962. He was elected Superior of the San Francisco Province in 1964 and again became Pastor in All Hallows Church, San Francisco and in Nampa and Honolulu.

Father Pratt was well acquainted with Notre Dame des Victoires, where he had been an assistant in 1970-71. He was aware of the problems he could expect when he became pastor in 1991 because of the UMB crisis, the decrease of the French community, and the lack of funds to retrofit the church. Since many parishes had the difficult task of grappling with the enormous issues of demographic change and financial pressures, the Archdiocese decided to start a Pastoral Planning Process: each parish should make a self-study to identify, reflect on, and discuss the issues, concerns, needs, and challenges facing the Archdiocese and the parish. In 1970, Notre Dame des Victoires High School had been closed; between 1975 and 1990, some 15 elementary and secondary schools in the Archdiocese of San Francisco were closed. Our school, which used to have 500 students in 1970 was down to 300 students in 1991. Notre Dame des Victoires Church is located only two blocks from Old St. Mary's, the first Cathedral, and if it were unable to raise \$3 million, our church could be closed and the people

who worshipped at Notre Dame des Victoires were told to walk just two blocks and go to Old St. Mary's instead. The threat of closure to the French church was very serious.

Father Pratt wanted parishioners and school parents to participate in meetings to

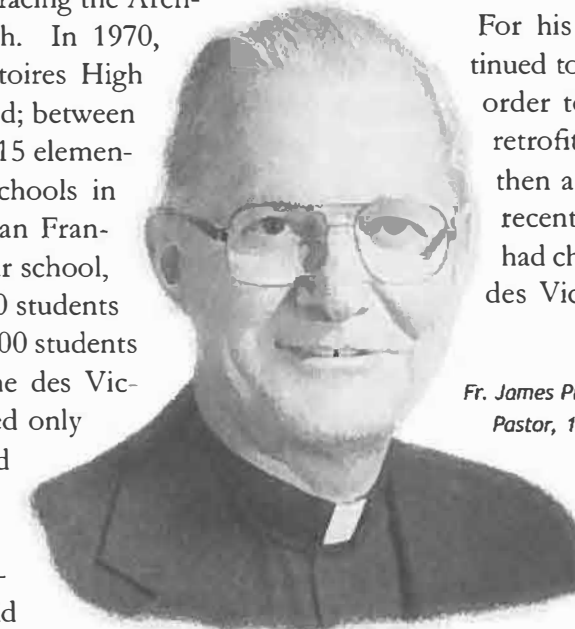
discuss the vision and mission of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and he asked them to respond to a questionnaire that considered the following:

- Evangelization and Faith Sharing
- Sharing of Resources
- Church Closures and Mergers
- Catholic Education
- Human Resources, Community Needs, Social Services

Some facts were troubling: the number of people attending Mass on a given Sunday in San Francisco was 123,000 in 1961; it was 47,000 in 1991; not enough priests were ordained for the Archdiocese each year to replace those who retired or died; the number of priests serving in each parish had been reduced and would likely be further reduced in the future.

For his part, Father Siffert continued to talk to his compatriots in order to raise enough money to retrofit the French Church. And then a miracle happened – three recently deceased parishioners had chosen to write Notre Dame des Victoires into their last wills and testaments to receive their houses as donations: one worth \$990,000; a second worth \$680,000; and a third worth \$240,000. A total of \$1,910,000!

And two-thirds of what was needed for the retrofit. With other donations received, we reached the goal of \$3 million in July 1993. At that time, Father Pratt was 75 years old and asked to be replaced. So, for a second term, Father Siffert became Pastor and Superior of Notre Dame des Victoires in August 1993,



Fr. James Pratt, S.M.,
Pastor, 1991-1993

with Father d'Auby as assistant. A year later, Father Bruce Lery, S.M., arrived in residence but was mostly involved in the AIDS ministry in the *Tenderloin* though he celebrated one of the three daily Masses and helped in Sunday Masses in the parish.

In September 1993, the parishioners of Notre Dame des Victoires received a letter from Archbishop John Quinn with a survey questionnaire. The Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission needed their thoughtful responses regarding how well they thought the Church was doing on a variety of issues. They were to mail back their responses directly to the Archdiocese. Although 120,000 surveys were distributed throughout the Archdiocese, only 30,000 responses were returned. The information was studied and discussed by the Commission which had the task of formulating a comprehensive pastoral plan for the Archdiocese of San Francisco over a 3-year period. The first elements of the Pastoral Plan were presented to the Archbishop who approved it on November 19, 1993.

The day before the Pastoral Plan was to be presented to the public, Father Siffert was asked to go to the rectory of the Cathedral. He was seated with two other pastors awaiting their turns to be called into the Archbishop's office. Nobody talked, knowing that in a few minutes, they would learn whether or not their church would be closed. The door of the office opened, a priest came out, walked off without saying anything, and disappeared. Father Siffert was invited to come in and to stretch out, place his right hand on a Bible, and swear not to say a word of what would be told him.

And he heard the following:

"Notre Dame des Victoires, which is the national parish of the French community, was entrusted to the Marist fathers in perpetuity by direct act of Pope Leo XIII and constitutes the church of the Marist Provincial House. Because of this, there is serious doubt about the ability of the Archdiocese

to close Notre Dame des Victoires at this time under the provisions of Church law. As a result, the Commission did not feel that it was free to recommend or evaluate the need for a closure of this parish and/or church. The parish already has sufficient funds to fully pay for the retrofitting of the church and thus will not be any drain upon the Archdiocese for this effort."

Father Siffert stood up, thanked the Archbishop, shook his hand, and as another pastor entered the Archbishop's office, left to go home. As he was driving home, he thought how right he had been to give Monsignor Armstrong, Chairman of the Pastoral Planning Commission, a copy of his brochure, *"The Marist Fathers of Notre Dame des Victoires, 1885-1985,"* published in 1985 that contained a copy of the decree dated, July 24, 1887, whereby Pope Leo XIII placed Notre Dame des Victoires under the charge of the Marists in perpetuity. The archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1906, so it was only in the archives of the Society of Mary in Rome that Father Siffert had found this decree unknown to the Archdiocese of San Francisco at that time.

Once Father Siffert arrived at the rectory, he was obliged to keep a straight face without showing any emotion, either of joy or of sadness. It was not easy to keep a straight face during dinner, since the members of the community were anxiously wondering about what he knew. It was only the next day when representatives of every parish gathered at the Cathedral, that the Commission's recommendations were made public.

First, the names of the twelve churches which would be closed were announced, and everyone can feel the reactions of the parishioners involved, especially those of All Hallows, since this church was also staffed by the Marists and nobody expected that it would be condemned. Then they announced the six churches which had to be retrofitted and would remain open, "if adequate funding can be at-

tained through a coordinated fundraising campaign and use of some limited Archdiocesan financial assistance." But the name of Notre Dame des Victoires was not mentioned among them, and as time went by, Father Siffert saw the parishioners who had come to the Cathedral with him talking with each other, turning their eyes toward him, and wondering what would happen to their little church.

Finally, at the very end of the list, the text that Father Siffert had heard the day before was read, and because the wording was a bit ambiguous, some people were not sure if Notre Dame des Victoires was spared or condemned. It was only when Father Siffert told them reassuringly, "Don't worry, we are fine," that everyone was relieved and started to smile.

It was true that the statement about the destiny of Notre Dame des Victoires was ambiguous: the declaration that "the Commission did not feel that it was free to recommend or evaluate the need for closure of this parish and/or church" is what we call in French, *langue de bois*, meaning stereotyped, formal language from which one can draw any conclusion one chooses.

But for Father Siffert, it was clear that the Archdiocese could not close Notre Dame des Victoires (a national parish for the French community with sufficient funds to fully pay for the retrofitting of its church), since it was already decided by the Commission to close All Hallows Church which was also staffed by the Marists. Such a decision would have meant that the Marist Fathers, without a church or a ministry, would have no recourse but to leave San Francisco. By closing both Notre Dame des Victoires and All Hallows, the Archdiocese would be saying, "We don't need Marists here any more," and the millions of dollars raised by the French Church would have gone into the Archdiocese's coffers, as was the case with the \$800,000 raised by All Hallows. San Francisco

would have lost good people of the religious who had worked for more than 100 years in two parishes and, at the very least, some people might say that, "The Archdiocese is more interested in money than in priests."

It is also strange that the statement did not cite the School of Notre Dame des Victoires, one of the best in the city, as being a point in favor of saving the church, but said instead that Notre Dame des Victoires, "constitutes the church of the Marist Provincial House." In 1993, there were only five priests and two brothers in this provincial house, and there was a chapel large enough for them. The Marists only needed to go to Notre Dame des Victoires Church when they had to celebrate the funeral of one of their members.

Whatever the actual reasons are for sparing the church, it was important to begin a survey of different firms from which could be selected one to retrofit Notre Dame des Victoires. Thanks to Mr. Joseph Baldelli, whose children attended the school and whose wife was teaching there, Notre Dame des Victoires was able to contact URS Consultants, Inc., where Mr. Baldelli was an engineer. On March 9, 1994, they submitted a "proposal for preparation of the Engineering Report for Seismic Strengthening and the fee estimate was \$42,864. Their proposal was accepted by the Archdiocese Building Department and they submitted a preliminary draft of an Engineering Report on October 4, 1994, which after some modifications, became final on March 6, 1995.

Then, different construction firms were contacted to submit their bids so that the actual retrofitting work could commence. Eight bids were received which were then studied by the architects, Mr. and Mrs. Campoamor, the Archdiocese Building Committee, and the Parish Council during many meetings. At the end of 1995, the number of candidates was reduced to three: the lowest bid was \$2 mil-

lion, Mayta and Jensen Contractors' bid for \$2,124,500, and the highest bid for \$3 million. After several more meetings, the Archdiocese accepted our choice of *Mayta and Jensen* whose fine work we knew well because they had renovated the school bathrooms in the courtyard. The parish had already spent \$316,961 for studies, testing, drawings, plans, construction fees, etcetera, and with this bid of \$2,124,500, the costs totalled close to \$2,500,000. The work was supposed to take at least 7 months.

Since the rectory shared a common wall with the church, it too needed to be retrofitted; so at the beginning of April 1996, the parish office moved to 544 Bush Street at the end of Chatham Alley, where the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange were kind enough to welcome our secretaries. Beds, furniture, library – everything was moved out of the rectory and stashed in different places. Some parishioners stored chairs, china, glasses into their homes and promised to bring them back after the renovation. They kept their promises!

The demolition of the floors of the rectory started on April 29, 1996, so that the timbers could be strengthened and a shear wall built from the basement to the top floor and connected to the church wall. The exterior walls of the rectory were reinforced.

On June 15, 1996, the church was closed and during the time of closure, Masses for the laity were celebrated in the Chapel of the Marist Center at 625 Pine Street where the priests resided during the restoration. The basement of the church hall was gutted and excavated; new pipes were installed to collect water leaking from the hill; new footings were built for the columns; shear walls were installed from the basement of the hall to the roof of the church; steel braces were put into the low roofs, and new gutters and slates were installed on the main roof. Inside the church, the floor was changed, an elevator for handicapped in-

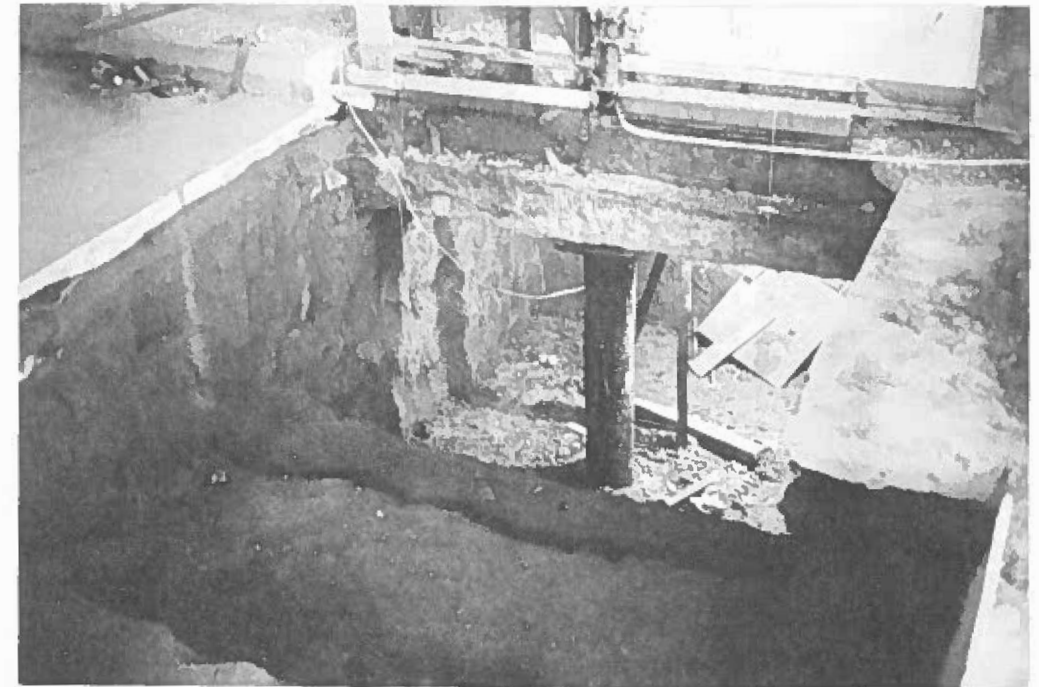
stalled, a reconciliation room built. The balcony was remodeled but the organ remained in place within a temporary box built to protect it from the dust.

In November 1996, scaffolding was installed to facilitate the checking of the bricks of the façade and the stones of the towers; the mortar had to be replaced in many areas. Finally, the church was ready in time for the celebration of Christmas, and on February 9, 1997, Most Reverend William J. Levada, Archbishop of San Francisco, presided at the French Mass to celebrate the completion of the retrofitting and the renovation of Notre Dame des Victoires Church and rectory. It was the first Catholic church in the Archdiocese to have its retrofitting work completed. In contrast, 10 years later, in 2006, Old St. Mary's is still trying to complete similar work, but their costs have doubled.

Adding all the expenses from the first studies of asbestos and lead removal in 1994 until the completion of the last projects of cleaning the stained glass windows and the painting of the church, the total cost of the retrofit and restoration amounted to \$2,800,000 – a considerably reasonable sum!

On March 1, 1998, the Historic Preservation Awards for the State of California were given to three notable projects in the Bay Area: The War Memorial Opera House, the Saint Francis Hotel, and Notre Dame des Victoires Church. This award recognized that our little French Church is a fine architectural and engineering example of restoration and retrofitting – it has been successfully made safe while being true to its historical design.

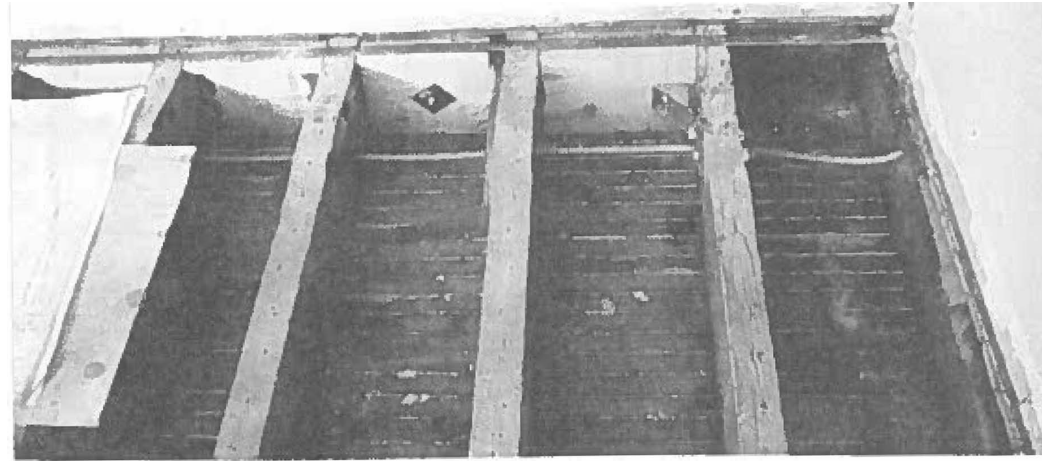
In August 1998, a familiar face, Brother Joe Grima, returned to Notre Dame des Victoires, and shortly after, in September, Father Merle Fisher, S.M., who had been with the parish in 1977 for 2 years followed. He later went to St. Louis Church, St. Paul, Minnesota in March



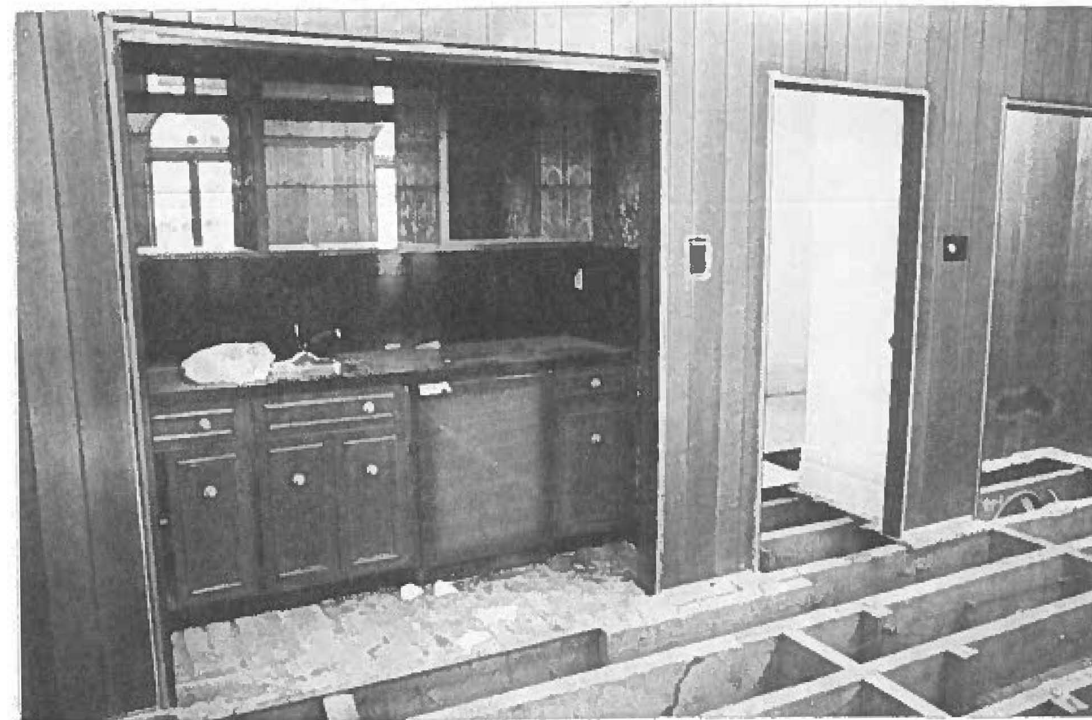
Rectory cellar: Hazardous materials were removed from the rectory. The basement was excavated and the beams were reinforced. The above picture shows the work done on the wine cellar that was so dear to Fr. Le Bihan



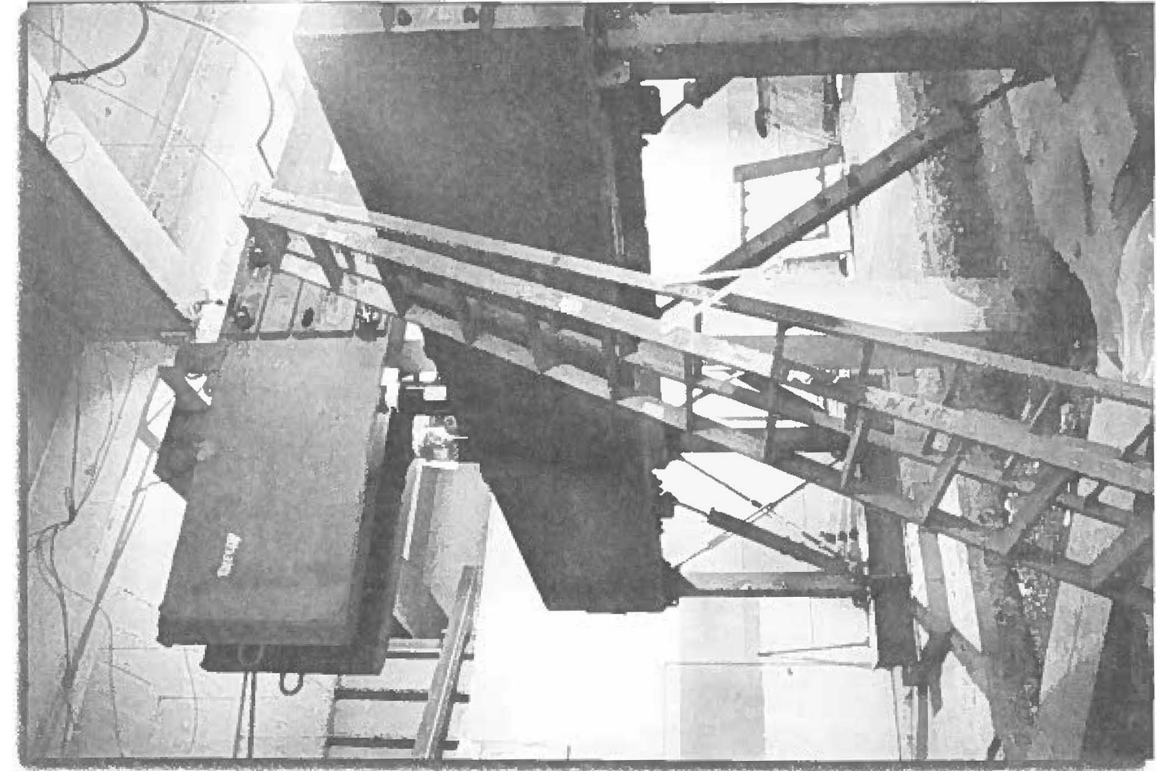
Rectory furnace and elevator: Shown above are the rectory furnace and on the right, the entrance to the elevator that now goes from the laundry room to the 3rd floor.



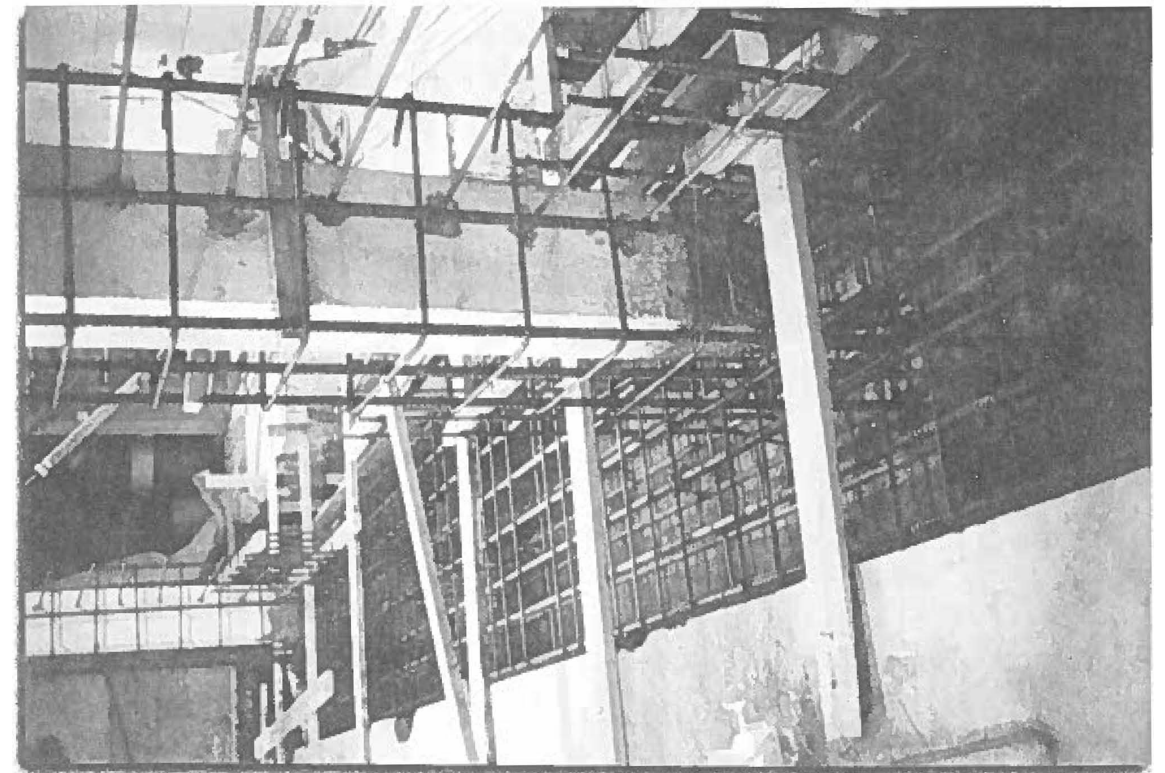
In every room of the rectory, floors were gutted and brackets connecting the floor joists to the walls were installed.



In the community room, the area was deemed strong enough to withstand an earthquake and therefore not require additional reinforcement.

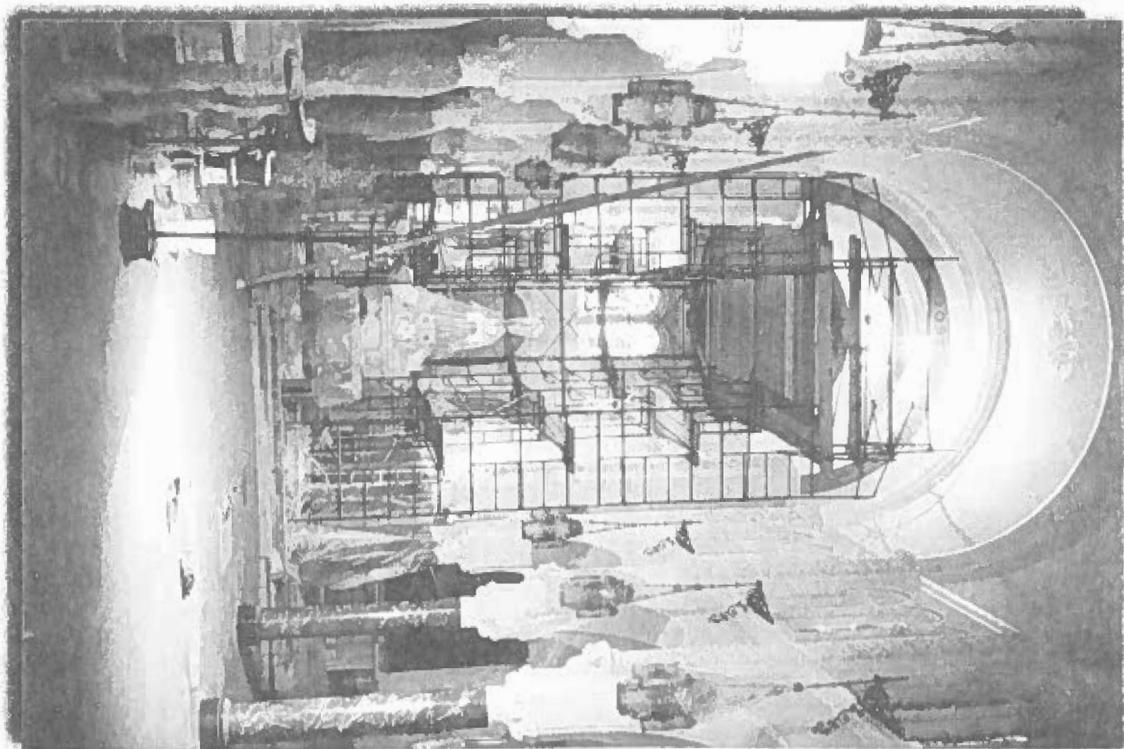


Church Hall: The basement was excavated and new footings were built for the columns. A hydraulic machine braced the columns to make it possible to replace the old footing that were in bad shape.

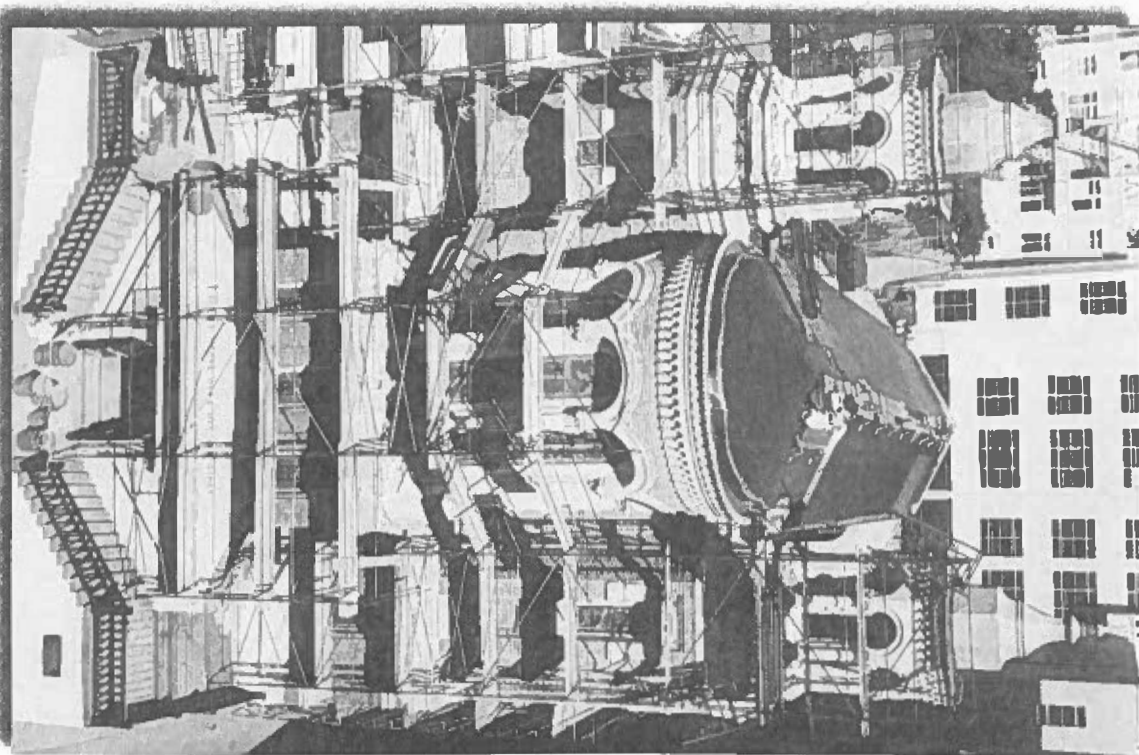


Tons of rebar and concrete were installed to make the columns stronger and shear walls were installed from the basement of the hall all the way up to the roof of the church where buttresses were built between the low roofs and main roof to strengthen the entire Church structure.

Retrofit work inside the church: the pews were removed in order to install new flooring. The stained windows were inspected, and the walls and ceilings were repainted



Scaffolding was installed to enable a thorough check of the bricks of the façade and the stones of the towers. Mortar was repointed, and new copper gutters, drainpipes, and roofing were installed



2000 for a year. While there, he fell very ill and was obliged to return to San Francisco. He passed away on November 26, 2001, at the age of 68, at the Little Sisters of the Poor where he had been in residence for only a few weeks.

Because of the lack of vocations, the deaths of several Marists between 1990 and 2000, the advanced age of others, the Province of San Francisco was obliged to leave several parishes in Hawaii, Arizona, and Idaho. In January 2000, the San Francisco Province merged with the Washington Province and became the Atlanta Province. A survey was taken among the Marists to know which parishes in the future should be kept, and Notre Dame des Victoires was at the head of the list because of its location and its usefulness in welcoming more senior religious in the Marist residence on Pine Street.

For example, Father Phillip d'Auby, who was 78 in 2002, retired after 14 years of good service in our parish and went to live in Pine Street. He still celebrates some Masses in the church, visits the sick at St. Francis Hospital, and continues to be the Chaplain of the Young Men's Institute which meets twice a month in the church hall.

Father René Iturbe, S.M. became parochial vicar in August 2002. His parents were born in the Basque Country, France, emigrated to the United States, and were married at Notre Dame des Victoires in 1945. Father René, baptized at Notre Dame des Victoires, attended the Marist high school and college seminary in San Rafael. He entered the Society of Mary, making his profession in 1967, and was ordained in 1974 at All Hallows Church. He knew Notre Dame des Victoires parish and school very well having made his diaconate internship there for 3 months in 1974. He was Superior of the Marist Province of San Francisco from 1987 to 1993. He also served as associate pastor at All Hallows Church for 6 years, worked in campus

ministry in Azusa, California for 6 years, and finally was associate, and later pastor at Star of the Sea Church in Santa Cruz, California. Father René has a B.A. in History, and an M.A. in Counseling and Theology.

Father René Iturbe, who had worked with young adults, noticed that our Sunday Masses at Notre Dame des Victoires were attended mostly by seniors living in the area, French people coming from places within and outside of San Francisco, parents and students of our school – some of whom also lived far away and who come for special Masses, and, finally, tourists. He thought we should reach out to the younger residents living in the downtown area. So he created a “think tank” of young adults to help answer questions about how the Catholic faith could be made relevant to their lives. In November 2002, a Young Adult Leadership Team was formed and, during Advent, they met each week in the rectory after the evening Sunday liturgy. There were Scripture reflections and sharing of thoughts on the readings from the following Sunday. In February 2003, Father René developed a Young Adult Discussion Group to consider the topic, “One Church, One Faith,” which included an introduction to Marist spirituality. Eucharistic ministers regularly went to visit patients at the Nob Hill Healthcare Center located on Hyde and Pine Streets; volunteers tutored students at DeMarillac School founded by the Daughters of Charity and Christian Brothers in the *Tenderloin* for poor children who did not pay any tuition; others volunteers participated in the listening post program in the *Tenderloin*, regularly spending several hours with residents and bringing small toiletries to the needy. During Lent, there were Scripture reflection, prayer, Adoration, and Benediction in the church every Wednesday evening. Some members of the faith community attended a diocesan meeting on evangelization each month with the hope that the parish will eventually develop its own

group on evangelization.

At the end of June 2003, during a retreat attended by the Marists of the Atlanta Province, the Provincial Superior had a discussion with Father Siffert about the future of Notre Dame des Victoires. He noted the fact that Father Siffert had served as pastor since 1993, for 10 years, even though the normal term was 6 years. It was decided that Father René would become pastor in July 2004, after he goes to France for a few months to improve his knowledge of the French language, and Father Siffert would remain at Notre Dame des Victoires to minister to his compatriots.

Ever since Father Etienne Siffert had become pastor, he was concerned that tuition and other fees covered only 70 percent of the actual operating budget of Notre Dame des Victoires School. In 1980, the tuition for a child was \$50 a month, or \$500 a year. In 2002, the tuition for a single child was \$500 a month. Each year, he struggled to find ways to avoid an increase which would force some parents to leave the school, and he wanted a discount for every second or third child in the same family. On the other hand, there were expenses necessary to upgrade the school that at that time was almost 80 years old.

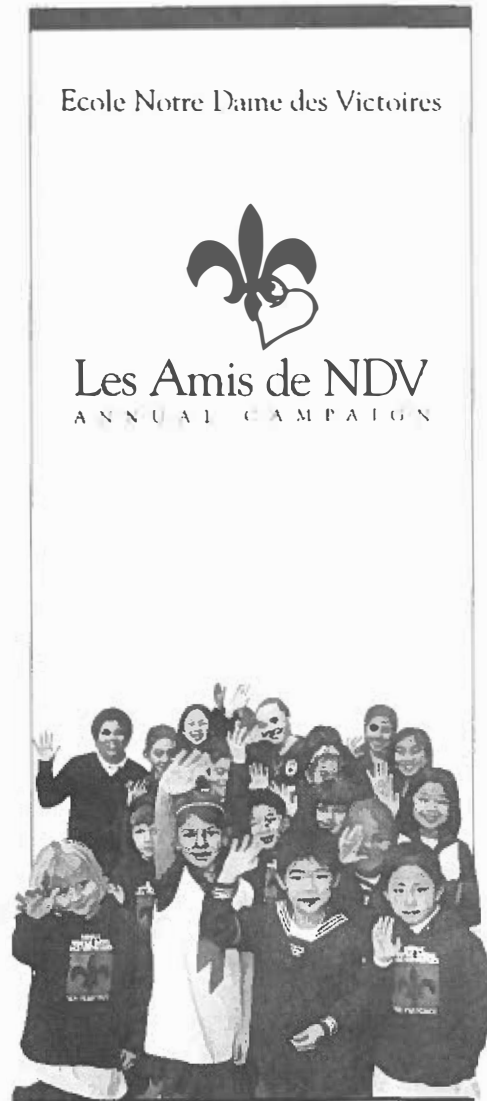
So, he enthusiastically supported the Prin-

cipal and the school board with their idea to start an annual campaign organized to provide funds to create new programs and new resources, to meet general operating expenses and to make structural improvements to the school; in short, to enhance the spiritual and academic development of our students. This campaign called *Les Amis de NDV*, was kicked off in September 2002, with a goal of \$80,000.

The campaign was divided into different phases of outreach, including: parents; faculty and staff; parishioners; alumni; grandparents; and the business community over a period of 6 or 7 months. A small brochure and a letter explaining the school's needs were sent to members of each group. During the parish phase in January 2004, Father Siffert, who had decided the year before to pay the salaries of the two full-time French teachers at the school out of the parish funds, wrote in his letter that all the funds coming from the French community and the parish in general would be restricted to scholarships dedicated to complementing the tuition of students whose parents could not afford to pay the full cost, for

example, single mothers and parents dealing with unemployment or illness in the family.

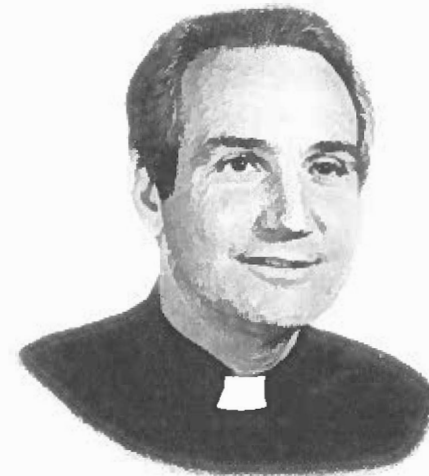
The first campaign was a success and raised over \$80,000, of which \$14,000 from the par-



ish phase went to scholarships. The rest of the funds were allotted to the installation of new flooring, new carpeting, new lockers, new lighting, and fresh paint in the school.

In September 2003, *Les Amis* began a second campaign with the same goal of \$80,000 and we received over \$94,000 allowing the school to refurbish the second and third floors with new carpeting, new lockers, new lighting, and fresh paint.

In September 2004, the third campaign saw our goal raised to \$100,000 and we received \$104,000 of which \$26,000 came from the parish phase allowing us to increase the scholarship fund to help more families.



Fr. René Iturbe, S.M., Pastor, 2004.

During the summer of 2005, a new project was decided on: to relocate the two offices of the principal and her secretary from the first floor of the school to the entrance of the auditorium. New lighting was installed in the auditorium foyer and from then on, parents and children entered the school through the beautified foyer of the auditorium. The former principal's office was converted into a conference room.

In September 2005, the fourth campaign of *Les Amis de NDV* had a goal of \$100,000.

With the funds, we expect to continue to improve the school facilities and to maintain the highest standards of academic excellence which have become synonymous with NDV's education.

Father René Iturbe left San Francisco on December 30, 2003 for Paris where he attended a language school, the Alliance Française, for a period of 4 months. Father Bruce Lery came back to Notre Dame des Victoires to fill in for Father René and would remain as associate in the parish when Father René came back from France in May 2004. The volunteer activity ministering to the *Tenderloin* tenement hotel community went on including work in tutoring at-risk children aged 6 to 11, providing toiletries to those living at the Ambassador Hotel, and delivering fresh fruit throughout San Francisco's homeless shelters and shelters for battered women.

Father Etienne Siffert's term as pastor came to an end on June 30, 2004. He celebrated a Thanksgiving Mass at the 10:30 A.M. French Mass on Sunday, July 6, followed by a reception attended by many parishioners and current and alumni school families, before he left for France for his vacation. On July 1, 2004, Father René Iturbe became the 23rd pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires. He greeted parishioners by stressing the different challenges facing them, especially that of sharing their gifts for each other and with each other through the ministries of hospitality, lecturing, and assisting the priest in the distribution of the Holy Eucharist in order to improve the quality of their gatherings for liturgy and prayer.

In September 2004, a new Pastoral Council was created which meets every month. One of its priorities was to affirm a "vision statement" which reads as following:

"As the French National Parish in the Marist tradition, we value the gifts of our Church and School and encourage the development of a deep, personal, and communal relationship with Christ

towards the purpose of reaching beyond ourselves to build a Kingdom of God.¹⁵

The challenge to develop a deep, personal, and communal relationship with Christ toward the **purpose of reaching beyond ourselves** to build the kingdom of God in our vision statement is understood by the Pastoral Council to mean that we cannot simply wait for people to come to the church building, but we need to reach into the community at-large where people are with their lives and invite them to participate in the experience and the building of the kingdom.

During the year 2004-2005, the Pastoral Council revised its by-laws, listened to the reports prepared by different committees, and set the date of the official celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the foundation of Notre Dame des Victoires for the first weekend of May 2006: on Friday, May 5, there would be a free concert in the church; on Saturday, May 6, an adult cocktail and hors d'oeuvres party will be held in the school auditorium and courtyard; on Sunday, May 7, a noon Family Mass presided over by the Most Reverend William Levada, Archbishop of San Francisco will be

celebrated. Since the invitation to the Archbishop Levada coincided with his appointment to the Vatican as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Archbishop asked Most Reverend John Wester, Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco, to preside at this Mass in his place. The Mass will be followed by a family event in the church hall, on Chatham Alley, and possibly also on Bush Street.

These 3 days celebrate the dedication of those who for 150 years worked at the French church and school: diocesan and Marist priests, brothers and sisters, parishioners and teachers. We also honor the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange who, for more than 80 years, taught at our school, until in July 2005, when the needs of their Order necessitated their leaving their convent at 544 Bush Street. We especially remember Sister Geraldine Ruiz, C.S.J., who passed away on November 17, 2003, and Sister Virginia Avellar, C.S.J., who passed away on May 16, 2004. Both of them had been students in our school, came back to teach, and assisted in the French catechism program before they left Notre Dame des Victoires to retire to their mother house in Orange, California

Left: Sister Virginia Avellar, C.S.J.
Right: Sister Geraldine Ruiz, C.S.J.



Chapter 7:

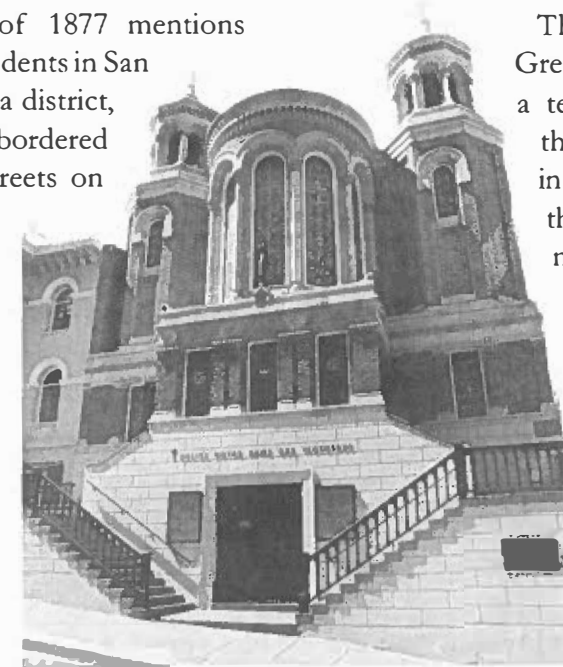
The Future of Notre Dame des Victoires: 2005-Onwards

It is difficult today to imagine the importance of the French community in San Francisco since the Gold Rush because of the dramatic series of demographic shifts over the years.

The *French Almanac* of 1877 mentions 3,400 names of French residents in San Francisco, living mostly in a district, called the *French Quarter*, bordered by Post and Broadway Streets on the west and north, between Leavenworth and Montgomery Streets on the west and east. They worked in hotels, restaurants, cafés, laundry shops, bakeries, and stores that sold novelties, dresses, coats, silks, stockings, etcetera. The French had their own stores; one of the best known, *The City of Paris*, was opened in 1851 by Felix Verdier and his

brother, Emile, at Sutter and Kearny Streets. After the 1906 Earthquake, *The City of Paris* was rebuilt at Geary and Stockton Streets, and until its final days in 1979, kept a touch of elegance and "savoir faire." Neiman Marcus bought the property, tore down the old store, but kept the famous rotunda in the style of Louis XVI giving an open view of all floors and decorated by a stained glass window depicting the *Ville de Paris* in full sail and its motto: "Fluctuat nec Mergitur," meaning, "it floats but never sinks." Raphael Weill, who arrived in San Francisco in

1855, opened a store, *The White House*, in 1864 at Sutter and Montgomery Streets and later at Post and Kearny Streets where it was rebuilt after 1906. It still stands although converted into a variety of stores and a garage.



The Earthquake and Great Fire of 1906 was a terrible catastrophe for the French people living in the *French Quarter* and their businesses. Many moved to the East Bay and never came back.

The *French Almanac* published in 1925 mentions more than 650 French residing in Oakland, but only 3,480 in San Francisco, where they operated 250 hotels, 26 restaurants, 125 laundry shops, 20 bakeries, 15 jewelry

stores, etcetera. They had a daily French newspaper, a French Hospital, and even two French churches and schools since St. Jeanne d'Arc Church and School were opened in 1922 in the Bay View district where the slaughterhouses attracted butchers and specialists in cooked pork meats – livers, pâtés, etcetera. There were also several French tanneries.

It was during the 1920s that the population of the French community in San Francisco started to decline. After the 1914-1918 war, fewer French emigrated from France to

the United States for a variety of reasons – some political, some economic. The registers of Notre Dame des Victoires Church show that the number of marriages and baptisms diminished dramatically. The figures speak for themselves:

Total Marriages and Baptisms in Notre Dame des Victoires: 1907-1946

Years	Marriages	Baptisms
1907-1916	869	1,349
1917-1926	677	953
1927-1936	537	669
1937-1946	378	680

It is interesting to note that at the same time, marriages between people in which at least one of the spouses was born in France or of French descent, referred to below as “French marriages,” also gradually decreased:

French and Non-French Marriages in Notre Dame des Victoires: 1907-1946

Years	French Marriages	Non-French Marriages
1907-1916	810	59
1917-1926	550	127
1927-1936	425	112
1937-1946	274	104

With baptisms, a “French baptism” being defined as that of a child born of a “French marriage” as defined above, the same trend occurs:

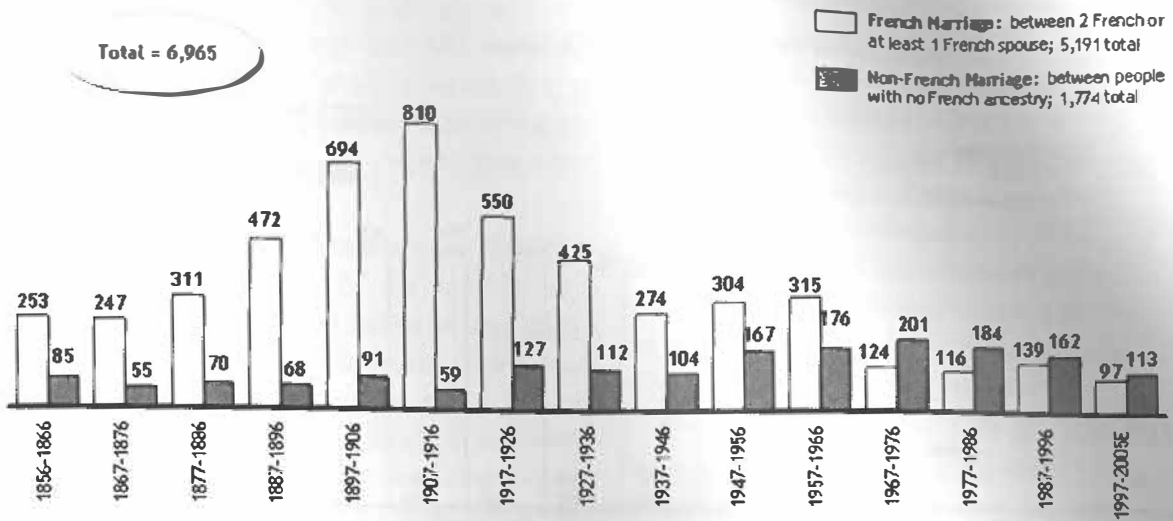
French and Non-French Baptisms in Notre Dame des Victoires: 1907-1946

Years	French Baptisms	Non-French Baptisms
1907-1916	1,278	71
1917-1926	892	71
1927-1936	546	123
1937-1946	549	131

It is significant to note that “French marriage” here means that merely one spouse is either born in France or is of French descent. Sometimes couples are married at Notre Dame des Victoires because at least one spouse is a third or fourth generation descendent of a French immigrant, although he or she no longer speaks French, even as a second language. We know that some French living in Marin or San Mateo counties or in the Richmond and Sunset districts of San Francisco prefer to be married in their own parishes, but the consequences are the same for the French church: we have more marriages of couples without French ancestry who come

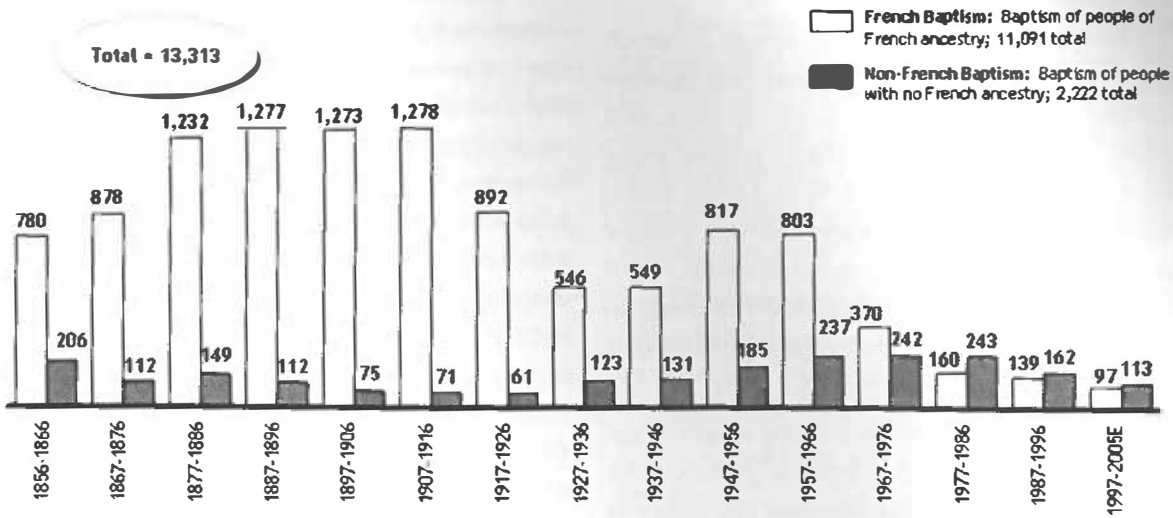
here because they attended our elementary school, they like the church, or simply because the church’s location is convenient, as when couples hold their reception in a downtown hotel. Every year since 1996, there have been between 6 and 8 “French marriages” and between 10 and 20 marriages of people who have no French ancestry.

Total Marriages at Notre Dame des Victoires: 1856-2005



It is almost the same for baptisms. Since 1996, there have been between 10 and 15 “French baptisms” and between 10 and 30 baptisms of infants who are not French at all.

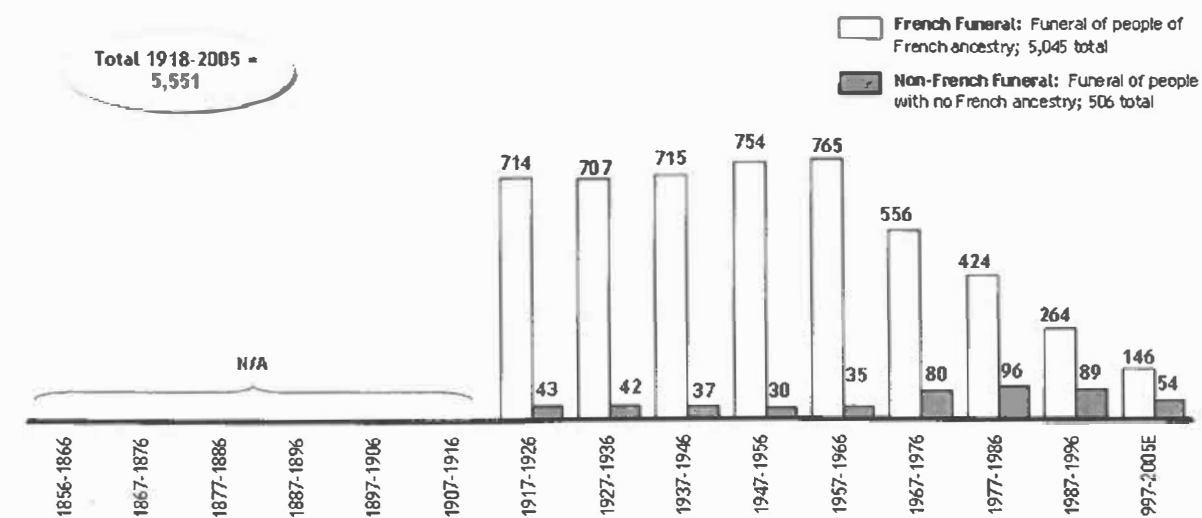
Total Baptisms at Notre Dame des Victoires: 1856-2005



There was no registry for funerals before 1918. However, since the end of the First World War in 1918, we find that only “French funerals” comprise the majority of funerals for two reasons: the neighborhood is made up of a majority of young people or non-Catholics; and the French deceased from other geographical parishes who choose to return to Notre Dame des Victoires for their funeral. There are more hotels and businesses in our neighborhood than

apartment/residential buildings and more young people reside in these apartment buildings for a few years compared to the elderly people who live out their lives in them. Older French people who moved away from San Francisco to escape high rents or because retirement in the country attracted them, still choose to be buried in the family plot at Holy Cross Cemetery after services at Notre Dame des Victoires. However, while there were between 60 and 70 funerals every year between 1930 and 1970, the number has decreased to 30 or 35 a year from then until the present.

Total Funerals at Notre Dame des Victoires: 1918-2005



Does this mean that Notre Dame des Victoires' own funeral has to be programmed in the future?

It is a fact that there is no longer a French Quarter in downtown San Francisco besides the French Church, the French Consulate, and a few French restaurants. Many people living in our neighborhood come from China, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, Mexico, Central and South America. Some are Catholics, but few young people stay longer than necessary to finish their studies or leave to establish homes after being married.

There are two French schools in San Francisco subsidized by the French government: The Lycée Français La Pérouse on Ashbury Street and the French American International School on Oak Street, but their students come from all over the Bay Area. Notre Dame des Victoires provides catechism courses in French for these students, but few attend the religion

classes which take place in the late afternoon when the students, having been dismissed from school, have to commute to often considerable distances home. Other French schools have been created recently in San Rafael, Berkeley, and Palo Alto to educate French students living far from San Francisco. Notre Dame des Victoires, founded in 1924 and the first French school in the city, now has only 12 students who are French or of French heritage. During the week, there are three daily Masses in our church: in the morning, for those on the way to work, at noon, during the lunch hour, and at the end of the working day. Between 60 and 80 worshippers attend these Masses but most of them are members of other parishes and do not attend our Sunday Masses, but are, all the same, glad to have the convenience of a church near their place of work.

On Sundays, the parish serves the needs of the many tourists and visitors who stay at the

downtown hotels. These people are spiritually motivated since they attend Mass while traveling or on vacation, but they are a transient group and we will often not see them the following Sunday. Therefore, it is impossible to create an active community for them.

Every Sunday, at 10:30 A.M., we celebrate the Mass in French for less than 80 people except for Christmas and Easter when the church is full, but even at these celebrations or special feasts, we see fewer French people year after year.

The challenge for Notre Dame des Victoires is to read the signs of the times by recognizing the changes and needs in our community, to reflect and listen to the Spirit, and to have the courage to respond to the call of the Spirit as we continue to minister to God's people. This includes actively reaching out, extending hospitality, and inviting liturgical celebrations.

For the last 2 years, we have had a special 5:30 P.M. Mass with a guitarist and a Filipino choir sings at the 12:15 Mass on the second Sunday of each month. The Hospitality Committee has organized receptions after most of the Sunday Masses. Another committee takes care of scheduling lectors and Eucharistic ministers. Another committee is in charge of the altar servers who are mostly students from the school since there are almost no children living in the area. Little by little, we will find more people interested in our ministry: in ministering to the elderly and the needy in the Tenderloin, bringing them hygienic materials and fresh fruit, tutoring the children who participate in the "reading room" at the Tenderloin's Children's Playground on Ellis Street.

School families attend either a Class Mass planned by a particular grade or a Family Mass to which all families are encouraged to attend. Each is followed by a reception with food and conversation.

To help our school and parents to be better witnesses of an authentically Christian life, we began in October 2004, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (RCIC). This program is for students from the third- and higher grades who have not yet been baptized and have not received the Sacraments of the First Eucharist, and Reconciliation. Also, every month, a group of adults interested in Marist spirituality meets in our rectory. Questionnaires have been distributed at Masses seeking input from our parishioners regarding their needs and concerns for the faith community of Notre Dame des Victoires. Taizé reconciliation services are held during the seasons of Lent and Advent for the students of the upper grades of our school, their parents, and parishioners.

Every Sunday, from 1:30 to 4:30 P.M., there is an Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the church. The Young Adults Group meets on the second Sunday of every month after the 5:30 P.M. Mass. Young adults deliver fresh fruits to women and children's shelters and other locations one Saturday morning each month.

There are morning prayers in the church on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays after the 7:00 A.M. Mass. Speakers are invited to come and help our parents and parishioners find ways during the Advent and Easter seasons to share their faith with their families, friends, and co-workers.

These are some examples of what we do toward building our faith community, listening to the Spirit, and revitalizing Notre Dame des Victoires as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of its foundation and contemplate a hopeful future.

CLERGY OF NOTRE DAME DES VICTOIRES: 1856-2006

PASTORS: 1856-1885 (DIOCESAN PRIESTS)

Rev. Dominique Blaive	1856-1862	Rev. Pierre Robert	1875-1885
Rev. Jean Molinier	1862 1869	Rev. Jean Marie Beaugelin	1885
Rev. Henry J. de Clerq	1869-1875		

PASTORS: 1885-PRESENT (MARIST FATHERS)

Rev. Onésime Renaudier, S.M.	1885 1892	Rev. Louis Le Bihan, S.M.	1927-1957
Rev. Henri Audiffred, S.M.	1892 1895	Rev. Julian Marquis, S.M.	1957-1964
Rev. Emile Gente, S.M.	1895-1897	Rev. James Marchant, S.M.	1965-1968
Rev. Alexandre Loude, S.M.	1897 1899	Rev. Emile Neyron, S.M.	1968-1975
Rev. Alexandre Hamet, S.M.	1899 1905	Rev. Leonard Ferringo, S.M.	1975 1983
Rev. Joseph Guibert, S.M.	1905-1908	Rev. Etienne Siffert, S.M.	1983-1991
Rev. Joseph Sollier, S.M.	1908-1911	Rev. James Pratt, S.M.	1991-1993
Rev. Henri Thierry, S.M.	1911 1917	Rev. Etienne Siffert, S.M.	1993 2004
Rev. Benjamin Allain, S.M.	1917-1921	Rev. René Iturbe, S.M.	2004
Rev. Henri Gérard, S.M.	1921-1927		

ASSISTANTS

Rev. Félix Barbier, S.M.	1888-1892	Rev. Léon Marx, S.M.	1952-1955
Rev. Emile Gente, S.M.	1892 1895	Rev. John McGoldrick, S.M.	1953 1955
Rev. Maurice Rousselon, S.M.	1895-1897	Rev. Julian Marquis, S.M.	1953 1957
Rev. Alexandre Hamet, S.M.	1897-1899	Rev. Emile Neyron, S.M.	1956-1968
Rev. François Hamet, S.M.	1897 1906	Rev. James Marchant, S.M.	1958 1965
Rev. Joseph Guibert, S.M.	1898-1905	Rev. John McGoldrick, S.M.	1958 1962
Rev. Léon Dubois, S.M.	1898 1899	Rev. Clement Mentzer, S.M.	1959-1960
Rev. Joseph Dreyer, S.M.	1900 1902	Rev. James Johnston, S.M.	1964 1966
Rev. Benjamin Allain, S.M.	1903-1904	Rev. Edward Donzé, S.M.	1966 1972
Rev. Philippe Nast, S.M.	1905 1907	Rev. Leonard Ferringo, S.M.	1968-1970
Rev. Emile Bertrand, S.M.	1907 1908	Rev. James Pratt, S.M.	1970 1971
Rev. Henri Thierry, S.M.	1907-1911	Rev. Paul Flynn, S.M.	1970 1972
Rev. Michael Murphy, S.M.	1908 1929	Rev. Herbert Merzbach, S.M.	1971-1977
Rev. Louis Le Bihan, S.M.	1911 1927	Rev. Michael Larkin, S.M.	1972 1973
Rev. François Hellet, S.M.	1920-1922	Rev. Henry Perez, S.M.	1973-1976
Rev. François Georgelin, S.M.	1922 1931	Rev. Edward Blee, S.M.	1975-1980
Rev. Julien Bouvy, S.M.	1925 1933	Rev. Etienne Siffert, S.M.	1975 1983
Rev. Henri Gérard, S.M.	1927-1949	Rev. Merle Fisher, S.M.	1977-1979
Rev. Constantin Chauve, S.M.	1932 1945	Rev. Michael Galnada, S.M.	1978-1983
Rev. Charles Tracey, S.M.	1933 1934	Rev. John Sullivan, S.M.	1983 1987
Rev. Robert Morin, S.M.	1934-1935	Rev. Joseph Robeck, S.M.	1985 1991
Rev. Paul Rietsch, S.M.	1934 1935	Rev. George Fahey, S.M.	1987-1988
Rev. Philip Dagneau, S.M.	1935 1936	Rev. Phillip d'Auby, S.M.	1988-2002
Rev. Henri Georges, S.M.	1936-1949	Rev. Etienne Siffert, S.M.	1991 1993
Rev. James Carroll, S.M.	1937-1939	Rev. Bruce Lery, S.M.	1993-1995
Rev. John McGoldrick, S.M.	1938 1942	Rev. Merle Fisher, S.M.	1998-2000
Rev. Julian Marquis, S.M.	1942-1950	Rev. René Iturbe, S.M.	2000 2004
Rev. Ernest Plegier, S.M.	1944-1946	Rev. Bruce Lery, S.M.	2004-
Rev. Joseph McManus, S.M.	1947 1948	Rev. Etienne Siffert, S.M.	2004-
Rev. Philip Hasson, S.M.	1948-1949		
Rev. John Martell, S.M.	1948-1949		
Rev. Antoine Chouinard, S.M.	1949 1952		
Rev. Emile Neyron, S.M.	1950 1952		
Rev. Louis Emmerth, S.M.	1952-1953		

PASTORAL ASSOCIATES

Brother Joseph Grima, S.M.	1963-1971
Brother Patrick Souza, S.M.	1971-1974
Brother Joseph Grima, S.M.	1974 1983
Brother Joseph Grima, S.M.	1998

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