

St. Philomena Parish

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St. Philomena Parish has a strong familial relationship with our two closest neighbors. Built by the Sacred Hearts Fathers as a mission of St. Elizabeth Parish in Aiea, its mission was to serve the Catholics in Damon Tract, a one-time residential area that is now the industrialized zone around Honolulu International Airport.

In 1942, James J. Sweeney, the first bishop of the newly established Diocese of Honolulu, established St. Philomena as a new Parish independent of St. Elizabeth's. Eight years later, in 1950, part of St. Philomena Parish would be separated to become the newly formed Holy Family Parish.

Notable Pastors and Administrators

St. Philomena Parish is privileged to have been served and led by many capable Pastors, Administrators and Pastoral Vicars over its seventy year history, but a handful of Pastors stand out in particular for their longevity and impact on the Parish. They have left a truly remarkable legacy during their stay and deserve special recognition in any recounting of the Parish history.



Fr. Edward Halloran

With his appointment in 1942, **Fr. Edward Halloran** became the founding Pastor of St. Philomena Parish and began a relationship with the Maryknoll Fathers that would last for 34 years until **Fr. Joseph Turk** was appointed Pastor of St. Philomena Parish in 1976, becoming the first diocesan priest to hold that position.

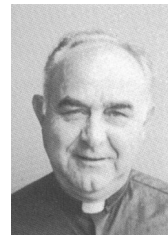
Father Halloran was Pastor of St. Philomena Parish for 11 years (1942-1953), guiding the Parish through its formative years, including the splitting off of Holy Family parish.



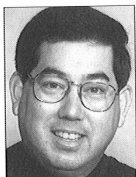
Fr. Edmund Toomey

Fr. Edmund Toomey (1957-1975) served as Pastor for a record 18 years. He guided the Parish through its first move within Damon Tract in 1959, as well as a later move to Salt Lake Boulevard in 1962, and built the new church at its present location on Ala Laulani Street in 1973.

Fr. Joseph Turk (1976-1985) served 9 years, during which time he built the Early Learning Center, started the fondly remembered Parish Family Fair, and retired the Parish debt.



Fr. Joseph Turk



Msgr. Terrence Watanabe

Msgr. Terrance Watanabe (1995-2008) had a 13 year tenure, during which he shepherded the Parish into a clustered arrangement with Holy Family Parish and built a major expansion of the St. Philomena Early Learning Center.

Unlike the other notable Pastors mentioned above, **Fr. Marino Angostura** had a brief 28-month tenure from February 2009 to June 2011, but during that time, he oversaw the de-clustering of St. Philomena and Holy Family parishes in June 2009 and guided the parish through many changes and improvements, formalizing relationships between the Parish Clergy and the various Parish Ministries and Administrative Committees.



Fr. Marino Angostura



Fr. Peter Miti

The current Pastor, **Fr. Peter Miti**, succeeded Fr. Marino at St. Philomena in June 2011. This was a personal milestone for Fr. Peter, who was ordained for the Diocese of Honolulu in June 2007 and previously served as a Pastoral Vicar at *St. John Vianney* Parish in Kailua, Oahu and *St. Catherine* Parish on Kauai.

From Damon Tract to Salt Lake

*F*or a while, St. Philomena held the sobriquet “*the most moved church in Honolulu*”. This was earned primarily because of the expansion of Honolulu International Airport in the 1950’s.

In January 1959 the airport expansion changed the zoning in the area and many residents and the services supporting them had to relocate. *Fr. Toomey* was forced to have St Philomena Church moved from 445 Airport Road to the corner of Nimitz Highway and R Street. The church had to be cut in half for the move.

Further development and rezoning of the entire area to industrial use forced a second move in 1962—this time, it was relocated to the Salt Lake area on the western outskirts of Honolulu. The first Mass was offered at the new site on January 20, 1963.



The original church survived both moves and had to be enlarged because of increased Mass attendance after moving to the Salt Lake area, with its rapidly expanding population base as improved highways and greater demand for homes sparked a housing boom in the area. A new Rectory was built at 3300 Ala Laulani Street in 1971 and construction was begun on a new Church at that site. Completion of the new Church was scheduled for November 1973, but 4 months before that, just as the new structure was beginning to take shape and moving plans were being made, tragedy struck.

At 4:23 pm on the afternoon of July 10, 1973, neighborhood children spotted flames in the area. By the time firefighters arrived, the building was engulfed in fire. St. Philomena Church and most of its contents had been destroyed by a maliciously set fire. Several other fires had been set in the vicinity in the weeks leading up to the burning of St. Philomena Church, but no one was ever arrested or tried for the crimes.

The new church at 3300 Ala Laulani Street was completed a few months later. Just before Christmas of that year, Bishop John Scanlan blessed the new church on December 22, 1973.

When *Fr. Joseph Turk* took the helm as the new Pastor in January 1976, the original \$600,000 mortgage on the church had a balance of \$410,000. By February 1985, one year ahead of the scheduled 13 year repayment date, it was completely paid off.

Under Fr. Turk the St. Philomena Pre-School and Kindergarten was constructed by parishioners, with the help of some of Fr. Turk's many friends in the construction industry. The school that is known today as the St. Philomena Early Learning Center and has a current enrollment of more than 200, began operations on September 15, 1978 with 25 students enrolled.



The early retirement of the parish debt was helped by the income from the annual Parish Family Fair. But even more than the money raised, the Family Fair has a legacy of building community in the parish. In perhaps the most extensive cooperative effort ever among our parishioners, men and women of the Parish worked together and joined their children and parish friends in games and play. Planning the event, building the booths, selling scrip, manning the booths, enjoying the games and food, breaking down and storing the booths for the next year. Though some Parishioners were consumed by the task from beginning till end and others had only minor roles, it seemed like everyone in the parish was fully involved. That sustained effort for a common cause remains a warm memory for many parishioners today.

Msgr. Terrance Watanabe brought a fresh vitality with him, imparting a certain flair to the Parish and giving it a larger presence within the Diocese than it previously had held. One of his major accomplishments, the SPELC's new Administration and Classroom buildings, garner frequent praise.

A Clustering Experiment and a New Beginning

*M*sgr. Watanabe's long tenure saw a change in the availability of priests in the Diocese. This new reality of fewer priests available to serve the same number of Parishes fostered a new organization that resulted in St. Philomena Parish, like many others in the Diocese, entering into a clustering arrangement. St. Philomena Parish was paired with Holy Family Parish in a re-union of congregations that had been a single entity more than 50 years earlier. It is to his credit that Msgr. Watanabe was able to make the arrangement work through the sheer strength of his personality and will. The clustered arrangement lasted for a tumultuous 5 years, from 2004 to 2009.

In August 2008, Msgr. Watanabe was reassigned and, after a brief care-taker role by Fr. Conrado Lomibao, *Fr. Marino Angostura* took over the reins of the Parish in February 2009. Fr. Marino added a second Sunday morning Mass at St. Philomena Church, which immediately stirred new life into what had become an increasingly moribund setting. In short order, after *Bishop Larry Silva* directed that St. Philomena and Holy Family parishes be de-clustered in June 2009, Fr. Marino oversaw and guided the parish through the de-clustering and followed up with many changes and improvements.

During his brief tenure, Fr. Marino had a very profound impact on the Parish. He

- Restructured the various ministries that had been shared between the two parishes for 5 years;
- Embraced improvements and extensions of the Food Pantry services and the Outreach program;
- Quickly restored the religious education and youth ministries at St. Philomena;
- Reactivated the choir with weekly practice sessions;
- Reorganized the Pastoral and Finance Councils.

Fr. Marino undertook initiatives:

- To foster interaction among the various ministries and to promote improved communication between the Pastor and the ministries, he instituted regular monthly meetings with all the ministries.
- To facilitate the return of the youth ministry, he added a Youth-oriented Sunday noon Mass.
- Most importantly, he fostered a re-invigoration of volunteerism among Parishioners.

Working with a new Parish Planning and Building Committee and with the active participation of St. Philomena Parishioners and members of the resident Korean Catholic Community, Fr. Marino directed a re-configuration of the Church's worship space, placing the altar in a focal point at the front of the Church and returning the crucifix to a prominent position at the front.

Parishioners responded to Fr. Marino's call for pride and leadership by making major improvements to the Church. Repairs to the Church included

- significant structural repairs of the exterior;
- re-painting both the interior and exterior of the Church and the Church the roof as well;
- major lighting improvements that included more efficient and brighter general lighting as well as a dramatic line of chandeliers down a wide center aisle;
- improvement of air circulation by the addition of overhead fans;
- replacing decades-old worn and stained carpeting with new ceramic tile;
- raising and beautifying the sanctuary; and
- installing new pews and other furnishings, including
 - a new baptistery,
 - a new ambo,
 - choir seating,
 - a tabernacle stand, and

- new seating for the Presider and Altar Servers.

Most impressively, all of this was accomplished without incurring any debt, while also improving the Parish's financial position.

Looking Ahead

Fr. Marino returned to his home Diocese in the Philippines after completion of his 3 year assignment in Hawaii, leaving big shoes to fill for his successor, *Fr. Peter Miti*, who came to St. Philomena in 2011 directly from his Pastoral Vicar assignment at St. Catherine Parish on Kauai.

Undaunted by the accomplishments of his predecessors and the expectations of Parishioners, *Fr. Peter* came in running. He continued the work of improving Parish facilities by making major improvements to the residential areas of the Parish Rectory:

- the roof has been repaired;
- the building exterior has been painted;
- the living quarters have been updated and improved:
 - water-stained carpeting replaced by engineered wood and wood laminate floors;
 - lighting fixtures replaced;
 - overhead fans installed;
 - water stained ceilings (from a leaky roof and plumbing mishaps) replaced and/or repainted; and
- internet communications have been improved;

Work has also continued in non-residential areas:

- the Church sound system has been improved;
- there is a new repository for the sacred oils;
- the gift shop has been re-located and re-configured;
- a better vesting sacristy has been found for the altar servers;
- the cry room has been re-instated;
- an improved front-area restroom has been made more accessible.

But not all improvements have been to the physical plant. Fr. Peter has paid heed to our spiritual needs.

- To ensure that liturgical ministers are properly trained in the duties and responsibilities of their roles, he has brought in outside resources and personally led days of reflection and renewal.
- He has set in place separate annual days of reflection and renewal for:
 - Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist;
 - Lectors;
 - Ushers/Ministers of Hospitality; and others;
- He has taken an active role in the Music Ministry;
- He has encouraged and promoted a re-invigorated Religious Education program;
- He has encouraged and expanded the Youth Ministry
 - Partially subsidized Parish Youth attendance at the Los Angeles Youth Congress has become an annual event;
 - Parish Youth are encouraged to and have interacted more with other Ministries:
 - Joining the Outreach Ministry in serving dinner to homeless shelter residents;
 - Joining the Respect Life Ministry in March for Life and other rallies.

Fr. Peter has also

- revitalized services to the elderly and infirm, formalizing the process of identifying and bringing Communion to the homebound;
- attended to the very young,
 - conducting paraliturgies for the children of the Early Learning Center;
 - attending ELC school functions;
 - providing guidance and support to the ELC administration.

*I*n summary, as the Parish celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2012, we could confidently say that during the short time that Fr. Peter has been our Pastor, he has given us ample reason to expect that over the years to come he will acquit himself well in serving the Parish, even when compared with some his most accomplished and admired predecessors.

We look forward with optimism to continued growth and service to our fellow man for many years to come!