

Our Lady of Lourdes Farewell Tribute 2024

Rejoice in the Lord, always! Rejoice!

More than being a time for nostalgic sadness, I see this as a time for rejoicing.

My name is Bernie Walsh, and I'm a lifelong parishioner of Our Lady of Lourdes, and a 1961 graduate of our grammar school. I would like to share some reflections with you about Our Lady of Lourdes parish.

As I just mentioned, this is a time to rejoice. Rejoice because this parish is completing a wonderful run of 132 years: 1892-2024. It has had a profoundly positive effect on the lives of thousands of parishioners. It has enriched us all. It has been a wonderful parish.

Where do we start?

We start with Our Lord, Jesus Christ, who founded our Catholic faith; our greatest treasure, a treasure that we were able to develop and hone at Lourdes. And that would apply doubly to those of us who were able to attend our grammar school, or the CCD programs, where our dedicated BVM sisters and lay teachers fostered our knowledge and growth in our faith.

What about this faith?

It is our Catholic faith that has grounded us in the Christian principles that would shape our character and help us to be loving, productive members of our great country--America.

More importantly, it laid the foundation for the greatest goal that we all have: the salvation of our soul.

Once again: Rejoice!

Mary is our intercessor, our bridge to God: To Jesus through Mary. Our Lady of Lourdes is our patroness and we had our own grotto to depict the scene in Lourdes, France. In 1991, as the leader of the group that wanted to start perpetual eucharistic adoration in our grotto, I asked then-pastor, Fr. James Colleran, on three different occasions, if we could start it, only to be denied each time. I thought that our luck had run out; however, in December of that year, he surprised me by asking me if I was still interested. Of course, I said "yes." The rest is history.

So, in 1992, we established perpetual eucharistic adoration in the grotto. It ran 24/7 until 2020, when we had to close because of the pandemic; however, in 2021, it re-opened on a partial basis, and continued until now. It had a great 32 year run.

What I so loved about the formation of perpetual eucharistic adoration in 1992, was the teamwork, that we, as parishioners, displayed. White, Hispanic and Filipino parishioners blended seamlessly into a dedicated, selfless group--and we did it! Some of the founding members included Cely Pasco, Sam Tacderas, Letty Garcia, Bob Bodnar, Sally and Norma Suyosa, Precious Deang, Tina Martinez, Laura Mondragon, Guadalupe Chavez, Honorata Pumanes, Deo and Aurora Olgado, and one year later, Marjorie Carmody, who became our most dedicated adorer. It was Marjorie who made our twenty four hour adoration possible by taking so many of the overnight hours. The adoration was an oasis of prayer and received favors ever since, and it provided a quiet refuge from our hectic world.

Rejoice in the Lord!

Another example of great teamwork here at Our Lady of Lourdes was our soup kitchen, whose founding members included Deacon John Klemanovic, Helen Cosgrove and Rosemary Vallely. It began in 1981 and lasted until January, 2022; 41 years in all. It provided a way of fulfilling the call to feed the hungry found in the 25th chapter of Mathew's gospel, as well as providing a platform for so many volunteers to pitch in. Students from various schools, groups like the Hibernians, parishioners from other parishes like Our Lady of Ransom, generous benefactors like Bob Fortune and Dan Sullivan--countless good people helped to keep it going, under the dedicated leadership of directors like our last two, Tim Morse and Bill Thome '71.

Rejoice in the Lord!

People. That's what makes up a parish. It is its people. I want to highlight some of the outstanding parishioners who walked the hallways of our school and sat in our church pews.

First, there was Msgr. Jack Egan '30. He was our social justice warrior who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King. There is a statue of Msgr. Egan on the campus of DePaul University that bears a quotation of his that says: "What are you doing for justice?" Also, there is a biography about him called "An Alley In Chicago " written by Margery Frisbie.

Another, was Fr. Jim Close '50, who became the head of Mercy Home for Boys, which he later expanded to include girls. Through his able guidance, the Mercy Home for Boys and Girls

was upgraded and improved. Countless youth from troubled backgrounds were given a stable home and an opportunity to succeed in life.

Then, there was Mario Tonelli '31 who played football at the University of Notre Dame. He scored the game-winning touchdown against the University of Southern California (USC), Notre Dame's greatest rival, at the Los Angeles Coliseum in the 1938 game. On hand, was a Japanese USC exchange student, who was a keen observer of the game and its players. Little did that student or Mario know at that time, that in four years, their paths would cross.

After graduating from Notre Dame, Mario played in the National Football League for the Chicago Cardinals, who are now the Arizona Cardinals of the NFL. However, war clouds were gathering, so Mario did his patriotic duty and enlisted in the Army, and was shipped to the Philippines after Pearl Harbor was attacked. His unit and he were overwhelmed by Japanese soldiers, captured, became prisoners, and were forced on a march that became known as the infamous Bataan Death March.

One day, one of the Japanese soldiers stole Mario's Notre Dame class ring, but a young lieutenant soon brought it back to him. He told Mario to hide it so they wouldn't take it again. Mario thanked him and asked him why he had done that. The lieutenant said that he was at the football game in Los Angeles and that he remembered him. Wow!

Mario hid it and they never got it. It was his prized possession until he died in 2003. I went to his funeral at Lourdes church, and outside, after the funeral, the Chicago Police Band played the Notre Dame Victory March, and, boy, did I get goose bumps. I

feel a special connection to Mario because we went to the same schools: Our Lady of Lourdes grammar school; DePaul Academy for high school; and the University of Notre Dame for college. So, I will be sure to wear my Notre Dame class ring to the final mass at Lourdes to honor my fellow Domer, Mario. Go Irish!

Finally, there is Dr. Tom Sullivan '57, whose older brother John '53, and younger brother Mike '61, my classmate, all attended Lourdes school. Tom was a true scholar-athlete. He set a national high school record for the mile run at 4:03.5, while a senior at Evanston's St. George H.S. Then, he won a track scholarship to Villanova University, where he was an All-American, and part of a record-setting two mile relay team at the Penn Relays in 1965.

Medical school was next and Tom became a pediatric neurologist and had a long and successful practice; while, at the same time, being a husband and father of two daughters. Tom was the embodiment of the American dream: he worked so hard to achieve his dreams, and he never stopped being a nice guy.

Rejoice in the Lord!

I have mentioned some of the more famous parishioners in Lourdes parish, but now I would like to highlight some of the more unsung heroes.

Maureen Kennedy '38 is the matriarch of the Lourdes Kennedy clan. Hey, America has a Kennedy clan, but so do we. Maureen and her late husband, Terry, sent their 9 children to Lourdes school. Terry and Maureen gave themselves selflessly to countless parish projects. But what really sets Maureen apart is

her sweetness and kindness. The same could be said of her twin sister, Sr. Josephine '38, a retired BVM nun.

JoAnne Festle. Where do I begin? JoAnne and her husband Ed '47, sent their 5 children to Lourdes school, also. If there was a club or a cause, JoAnne was involved. Her talents started with being an outstanding church secretary, who groomed Elsa Aguirre and Hilda Correa '79, to be her indispensable, long-time assistants. Then, for awhile, JoAnne was a teacher at Lourdes school. Also, JoAnne's talents blossomed as an archivist, historian and administrator. But I'll always remember JoAnne most for her tireless administration of our old summer carnivals. Five days of pure fun. Yeah, right! How JoAnne kept her wits about her, while we were losing ours, will always amaze me.

Jim Masini was our very capable business manager. Jim needed rubber money to make it stretch to cover our expenses, but he did it. What stands out about Jim to me was what a genuinely nice guy he was. He was always kind and accommodating, no matter how busy he was. Besides, when he had an extra White Sox ticket, he would invite me along. I know that I'm in Cub territory, behind enemy lines, but I had to throw that in there. Forgive me, Lord!

Rejoice in the Lord!

When it comes to school teachers, I want to mention two.

First, was Sr. Emilissa. She was our music teacher. She brought so much energy and fun into our classes. That wasn't always the case back in the 50s! Believe me! Anyway, she was an excellent piano teacher for so many students; but, unfortunately, I was too

hooked on sports in those days to take advantage of the opportunity.

Secondly, there was Ginger Dalton. Ginger was a Lourdes student who graduated in 1953, and came back to teach here after starting her family. And teach she did! She began in 1970 and stayed until the closing in 2004. Her classes were fun, informative and lively.

Let's see: $8+34=42$. 42 years of her life were spent at Lourdes school. I guess you could call that an example of dedication. Thank you, Ginger!

Then, there were the school principals, whose last two, Anne Balzanto and Noel Ferrara, did their best to keep the school going as long as possible. As for me, I can't forget my principal, Sr. Mary Norelle. One Friday in 6th grade, she caught me chewing gum, which was forbidden. My punishment was to learn five pages of a science book, word for word. That whole weekend was consumed by learning those five pages. When the showdown came on Monday, I went to the principal's office and began. I started out strongly, was doing well, but then I was beginning to have a lapse. Luckily, at that very moment, her phone rang, and while she answered it, I glanced at the book in front of her, and saw the words I had forgotten. From then on, I finished perfectly. Had it not been for that phone call, I might not be alive now!

Rejoice in the Lord!

Also, we had numerous outstanding priests and deacons through the years. Msgr. Cletus O'Donnell led the way in the 50s and eventually became a bishop. Other priests like Fr. Nestor

Saenz and Fr. Manny Duterte were known for their friendliness and kindness. In addition, we had a large number of priests from around the world who stayed with us as they pursued graduate degrees at various universities. This would include the following: Fr. Alvaro Jimenez from Colombia; Fr. Donatus from Nigeria; Fr. Chris Mohan from Ireland; Fr. Tom from India; and Fr. Melchior from China. Their diversity enriched us.

As for deacons, our two longtime English-speaking deacons were Roy Henry and John Klemanovic, who was one of the founders of the soup kitchen. As for the Spanish-speaking deacons, two really stood out: Miguel Valle and Daniel Patino. Miguel was the dynamic leader of the Charismatic group, was a radio host, and ran a Catholic book store; while, Daniel, who was known for his friendliness, was a professional chef, who helped frequently at the soup kitchen.

Rejoice in the Lord!

Finally, there were the pastors.

For me, it started with Msgr. Campbell, who threw great Christmas parties at the school. Then, there was Fr. Goldrick, Fr. Corrigan, Fr. Colleran, Fr. Farrell (Administrator), Fr. Lambert, Fr. McQuinn, Fr. Shanahan, and Fr. Dorantes, who is also the pastor of St. Mary of the Lake parish, at the present time. Thanks to their spiritual guidance and hard work, the parish flourished. May God bless all of them.

Before I forget, I want to thank Ed Kelly, who worked at Chase Park, and was our gym teacher (remember: steal the bacon, dodge ball, etc). Also, we were lucky that he coached our Lourdes softball and basketball teams, and lead us to many

championships. One of his assistants, Lenny Amari '56, coached my 6th grade softball team to a stunning upset over the Lourdes 7th grade team to win the 1959 Chase Park softball championship. That was like heaven for us 12 year old upstarts!

Rejoice in the Lord!

In 2021, we had two all-year school reunions that went very well, thanks to Mary Joyce Clancy '69, Hilda Correa '79, Fia Torres '83, and, especially, Maria Ugarte '69. Maria has a YouTube page under her full name, Maria Luisa Ugarte, which has many still shots and video clips of the reunions.

The reunions went very well, and I was able to talk to some classmates that I hadn't seen in 60 years. Hard to believe!

I want to thank all of you for reading my story: Thanks-Gracias-Salamat!

Rejoice in the Lord, always! Rejoice!

Our Lady of Lourdes, hail to thee!

- Bernie Walsh '61 (May 2024)