FROM
Humble Beginnings
Few parishes are fortunate enough to have as detailed a record of their heritage as has Holy Redeemer. A devoted parishioner who was instrumental in organizing the infant Church was Mrs. Anthony Tress. She faithfully documented on some fifty handwritten pages a record of our modest beginning, tracing the courageous development of Holy Redeemer from 1895 through the first quarter of the Twentieth Century.

Sunday school teacher, housekeeper, storekeeper, Mrs. Tress devoted a great deal of her time, energy and love in helping Holy Redeemer during its infancy. Beginnings are not only humble ... but also most difficult. Here, in Mrs. Tress's own words is a portion of how Holy Redeemer, once a mission of St. James Church of Orlando, began ...

"In the fall of 1895, Anthony Tress, my husband, came to Florida from Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania., for his health, and, at that time, a Jesuit priest of Tampa came to Kissimmee about once a year and would say Mass at the Tropical Hotel. The children and I came in 1898 and the holy sacrifice of the Mass was offered up in a defunct bank's building about three times a year. Mr. E. J. Dunne and family lived in the same building and the priest, Father La Blanc, stayed with them while in Kissimmee, as they were the only Catholics there besides Mr. Tress. The Dunne family left in the spring of 1899, and the priests would stay at our house and would say Mass in our sitting room. Father La Blanc came to Kissimmee until he had a nervous breakdown, and was forced to give up the mission work. After that, the different priests would come from Tampa, but I can't recall their names - only one, Father Navou, who promised that he would get me the necessary things for saying Mass when the priest would come, as I was planning to have a chapel in my house."
"In the spring of 1901, my brother, Father Hugo Paff, of the Sacred Heart Church of Wilmington, Delaware, paid me an unexpected but much welcomed visit, and he was surprised that I didn't have the necessary things for saying Mass. I told him that Father Navou has promised that he would try to get them for me through the Extension Society, and my brother said that I might have to wait so long for them, and that he would see what he could do in his parish. In the fall of that year, a mission outfit from Father Hugo came. There were two reversible vestments, white and red, purple and black; two sets of altar linens; a brass crucifix; two brass candlesticks; a silver chalice lined with gold; a Mass book and stand; a set of cruets; and a bell. A few months later, to my surprise, a box came with the Stations of the Cross from Mr. Bernard Clockler of Pittsburgh, who was a friend of Mr. Tress' father. Mr. Clockler had given these stations to his own parish years ago and later had replaced them by better ones. The first ones were given to the sisters for their chapel in that parish. In 1901, Mr. Clockler bought life-size stations for his own church and gave the second ones to the sisters, and they wanted to know what they would do with the ones they had, and he told them that he had a place for them in Florida. So that was the starting of my chapel. My father-in-law, Mr. Sebastian Tress, made three pews and kneelers; Mr. Charles Schmidt, my husband's step-brother, made the altar; Mr. A. Tress built the plain tabernacle. When finished, it was all very nice and neat. It was blessed by Father Navou and was named St. Anne's Chapel.

"About that time, a large family by the name of Garrity moved to Kissimmee
from what is now called "Old St. Cloud." It was at this time that the Sunday School was first organized. There were only the two families there so we would go to each other’s home on alternate Sundays for Sunday School and prayer. After they moved away, I had Sunday School and prayer in my chapel till the church was built.

"In the winter of 1902, Father Eugene Dokovitch of Newark, New Jersey, who was a dear friend of Father Hugo Paff, spent six weeks with us on account of his health. There was Mass in the chapel every day and as it was during Christmas season, we had Midnight Mass in the chapel, and then one at seven o'clock and one at eight.

"It was so far from Tampa, so Father M. Fox of Orlando was put in charge of this mission in 1902 or 1903. He would say mass here about four times a year on weekdays till about 1908 or 1909; then he started coming once a month on Sundays. In about 1910, a great many Catholics came to Kissimmee, so I fixed a temporary altar in the theater Saturday night, after the picture show was over.

"I superintended all the church work and Sunday School, until Father W. B. Golden took charge and still do the cleaning of the church, washing of the linens of the Main Altar, the priests' linens and the altar-boys' suits. Sometimes some of the ladies would volunteer to help and other times I would have to do it all myself.

"It was either in 1910 or 1911 that Florida was boosted so highly and our congregation was large, and at this time, Father Fox thought that it would be well to select lots for a church. While here on his regular mission trip,
Father Fox told me that there was a fine half-block in northwest Kissimmee, and if he could buy it, he would be happy there. I asked him how much it cost, and he said, "Sixteen-hundred dollars," and I told him that we didn't have sixteen cents to start with. He then said that if we would try to raise money towards building a church, he would see if he could get money to buy the lots. Everyone worked hard and made pretty good. The lots were bought in the summer of 1911. Father Fox's health failed, and as his mother was still living, he took a trip to Ireland, so the building of the church was postponed until 1912. On his way to Ireland, Father Fox got acquainted with two wealthy men, and in talking about church matters, mentioned his poor missions, and especially Kissimmee; one of the men didn't consider it at all; and the other said that it was customary for him to give a thousand dollars, if the people were real anxious, and would work hard. Father Fox said that the people of Kissimmee have worked and are working hard, so he got the check for a thousand dollars. Father Fox deprived himself of many comforts to help this church along.

"There were about twelve families here when the church was first built. Benter, Canova, Dietz, Kelly, Muller, Kulp, Regero, Rotundo, Santiago and Tress.

The Catholic Church in Florida

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Spanish missionaries visited the Indian villages along the coast of Florida, but no permanent missions were established south of St. Augustine on the east coast and south of Gainesville in central Florida. Florida became a territory in 1821, a state in 1845, after which Catholic families began settling in central Florida.
primarily along the east coast. These early Catholic families were serviced by various missionary priests who reported to Dioceses and Vicariates located in Cuba, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia. . . until the St. Augustine Diocese was established in 1870.

The pioneer clergy of the St. Augustine Diocese, the first in Florida, were largely of French extract. They were followed by Irish-born priests, subsequently by American-born men and later by Spanish priests.

The first bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine was a young Frenchman, Reverend Augustin Verot, who was appointed to that post in 1870. This established the first Catholic newspaper in Florida, preserved the sacred grounds of Nombre de Dios, where the first parish Mass was celebrated in the United States on September 8, 1565, where he had a chapel reconstructed. He uncovered the early religious records of St. Augustine in Cuba returning them to the town. He spoke out publicly against slavery, brought in French nuns to educate black children and spoke out against the spiritual condition of prisoners in the infamous Andersonville, Georgia prison. After his demise, he was followed by Bishop John Moore, an Irishman from County Westmeath. Active during the Civil War, Bishop Moore served the Florida Diocese until 1901, enjoying some growth of Catholic families in the area; bringing Jesuits into the Tampa section, Benedictine's to Pasco County. It was under Bishop Moore that Kissimmee was first serviced through missionary priests.
Bishop Kenny followed Bishop Moore, a dedicated man who was known for his care of orphans. A native American, Bishop Moore approved the building of the first Holy Redeemer. Archbishop Joseph P. Hurley was one of the most notable clergymen in the American Catholic church. After five years as Bishop of St. Augustine, he was appointed regent ad interim at the Apostolic Nunciature in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where he was the Holy Father's representative at the mock trial during which Cardinal Stepinac was accused of treason by the Tito government. He was elevated to Archbishop in 1950. During his episcopate in 1958, the Diocese of Miami was created. This was the first separate Diocese since the founding of the Diocese of St. Augustine.

Although not established as a separate Diocese until June 18, 1968, the Diocese of Orlando dates back to St. James Parish in Orlando, which was formed by Bishop John Moore in 1881. He purchased a tract of land in the center of Orlando for $1,050. Reverend Michael Fox was placed in charge of St. James in 1892, spending forty years to visit five counties in the area which included Kissimmee. It is said that he traveled by train, mule, horse, bicycle or automobile - any available mode of transportation for his missionary work. Kissimmee's Catholic population did not begin to arrive until 1895, although the town was a trading post as early as 1880. The City of Kissimmee was first incorporated back in 1883.

Landmarks...

The first baptisms were of Mathilda Dietz and Louisa Muller back in April of 1912. On May 5, 1912, the first cornerstone of the little brick church, that was to seat 175 people, was laid. On June 30, 1912, the first Mass was said in the newly built $7000 church, which had no pews nor electricity. Father Fox donated fifty folding chairs which were used in monthly services. In August of 1913, electric lights were installed. A lecture series began on
February 6, 1914, and pews were installed in 1915. In 1918, four 22-inch statues were acquired; two for the Main Altar and one each for the side altars. The first burial from the square Gothic-style church was in 1914. The first marriage of Joseph Stephen Ortego to Rosa Tress Rosenberg took place in 1915.

From 1915, Holy Redeemer parishioners have been married in front of the Main Altar.

**Priests with a Missionary Spirit**

The first priest in Kissimmee was Father Anthony Le Blanc, a missionary who resided with the Tress family. After him followed Father Fox of St. James in Orlando. He established the parish and worked diligently to make it a living part of the Catholic life in the community. He was a careful man who had catechism at Mass in place of a homily, perhaps, believing that in an outpost such as Kissimmee, it was necessary, always, to instruct at the Mass as well as to say Mass. Under the direction and inspiration of Father Fox, the first little Church was built. Father Fox was not a well man. In due time it was necessary for him to give way to our second pastor, Father Golden. Father Golden was an older man who helped this determined parish expand through the First World War and the years following. From Mrs. Tress's account, Father Golden asked for the parish, and when he did, was told that its few members would not be able to support him. His reply was that he would be grateful for anything given him and would support himself, if necessary, help pay off the church's debt and make any necessary improvements. Of this dedicated man, there is a charming story that he drove an Essex, but very badly...often ending up in a ditch. Frequently on these rides, he was accompanied by altar boys who landed in the ditches with him. If the boys complained, he explained that it was his prerogative to drive in ditches, if he
wished to do so! It was men like this who have shaped and molded our destiny.

**HOLY REDEEMER’S PASTORS**

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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning to 1917</td>
<td>Rev. Michael Fox</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917-1923</td>
<td>Rev. Walter Golden</td>
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<td>1925-1927</td>
<td>Rev. E. Ryans</td>
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<td>1930-1934</td>
<td>Rev. Anthony McGowan</td>
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<td>Rev. P. G. O’Donahue</td>
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<td>Rev. Alfred McDonald</td>
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<td>Rev. Joseph Barry</td>
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<td>Rev. Michael Reynolds</td>
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<td>Rev. Frank Dunleavy</td>
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<td>Rev. Emil Heiring</td>
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<td>Rev. William O’Farrell</td>
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<td>Rev. David Cronin</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957-1961 (Feb.-May)</td>
<td>Rev. James Lowe</td>
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"God is here . . . forever and ever.” Ps. 48:12-14

**Entering A New Era**

**The Arrival of Father Nolan**

Father Nolan was born in Mullingar, Ireland a town similar to Kissimmee,
famous for its cattle and horses. Irish-educated, Father Nolan prior to this post, spent eight years as a priest in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle; two years at Mary Magdalen in Maitland and one year at the Church of the Ascension in Eau Gailie. Says Father of these prepared me for what was in store at Kissimmee!"

In 1972, Father Nolan arrived in Kissimmee, almost simultaneously with the adjacent Disney World enterprise. Faced with a mere $300 in the bank and a few debts, a high-attendance at Mass; an even greater number of Disney World Catholic visitors every month, Father Nolan's astute vision of the future recognized that the little Church to which he had come was totally inadequate for its new and predicted needs. He transmitted our need for a larger church to the Bishop of Orlando and to the parishioners, who sought diligently to raise the needed money. His budget of $301,000 received support from both quarters. In fact, the budget was increased to $351,000 by the Chancery; but the original estimate was most accurate. The church cost $301,362 to build.

Through Father Nolan's consistent efforts and unfailing devotion, the old church was sold to the First United Methodist Church for $85,000; a building fund pledge drive was launched, culminating in total pledges of over $220,000 from about 350 families; truly an incredible and most encouraging response. Says Father Nolan of the exciting and sometimes frustrating events that followed the approval to build the beautiful new church . . . "Ground breaking took place on the 11th of February 1973 the coldest day I remember in Florida! And so we were off the ground. After months of waiting, at last on **November 22, 1973, Thanksgiving Day**, we had our
grand opening. The church was packed to the doors; the air-conditioning wasn't working; the sanctuary was covered with scraps of carpet; the shades on the lights had melted the first time they were turned on the night before... but who cared! At last we had made it. We were in our new church and it was a great day for Holy Redeemer! We were used to things going wrong at the last minute, so it all seemed quite in the ordinary run of things. "He goes on to say," And the final chapter of the building program was the Solemn Dedication of the church by His Excellency Bishop Borders of Orlando and His Excellency Bishop McCormack of Meath, Ireland. And what a great day that was even if the organ refused to play! Maybe God was telling us something - not to get too proud!"

CONTEMPORARY LANDMARKS...

The ground-breaking ceremony was held on February 11, 1973. It was in July of 1973 that the cornerstone for the new Church was blessed. The new Holy Redeemer Church was completed on November 22, 1973, with the first mass offered on the 27th of November of the same year. Father Nolan administered the first baptism of Brian Michael Cochrane on December 2, 1973. The first baptism after the Baptistry arrived was of Andrew Barnes Prather on December 9, 1973, by Reverend Peter Quinn. The new Holy Redeemer was dedicated on February 17, 1974. At that time, Bishop John McCormack from County Meath in Ireland came along with an impressive number of priests and nuns from all corners of the state. Holy Redeemer was honored to have such a notable guest as Bishop McCormack and so many other well-wishers who were supportive to the new Church.

... FOR A CONTEMPORARY CHURCH
In every way, Holy Redeemer is a contemporary form. The edifice for Holy Redeemer stands bold and strong touched by warm sunlight. The total building is the result of years of hope, months of work and hours of endless toil, all of which result in this House of Worship, a magnificent structure of great beauty. It is an example of what a true community united in Christ could bring about.

**HARD WORK AND ITS REWARDS**

Early sketches of the new church were put aside as changes in concept were made. Finally, Father Nolan saw the sketch or rendering of a church . . . a church with richness in design, a quality of softness and spiritual attitude. On February 11, 1973, ground was broken for the new structure - the magnificent Church which had been long awaited by parishioners and priests alike. As Winter turned into Spring, and the chosen site started to take shape, the walls gradually rose higher every working day. Week after week, the imposing new Church took on its planned appearance. Workmen toiled feverishly to complete interior touches . . . for the first Mass was to be said on Thanksgiving Day. While not wholly completed, the Church was the subject of awe and wonderment by parishioners who moved quietly through the majestic beauty of its interior. Hearts were filled to overflowing in gratitude. Holy Redeemer was built piece by piece. A slow, changing, difficult process - a time consuming process. A process that made Father Nolan almost unreachable at times but never to his own parishioners. From the laying of the cornerstone to the initial construction . . . to the temporary . . . fittings . . . to the landscaping . . . to the first Mass . . . and finally to the Dedication, the devotion of the parishioners and clergy to the completion of this project must not go unrecorded.
OUR NEW CHURCH …

At the main entrance, wooden beams vault skyward leading all eyes to the Cross of Christ, which is the main focal point of the exterior of the Church. Through the fan-like shape of the beams, it is believed that the mind of man is brought closer to God. As one enters the spacious Narthex, there is revealed the element of proportion and warmth. Upon entering the Nave, behold - the viewer is greeted with a beautiful esthetic sight!

To give newcomers and visiting tourists the feeling that Holy Redeemer was truly a Florida Church, Roberts and Associates carefully selected materials reflecting the nature and flavor of the local area. Natural wood, stone, glass which encouraged the sunlight to enter, each contributing to a bejeweled effect at the Sanctuary.

"Let us meet at the Temple of God." Nehemiah 6:10

Breathtaking Stained Glass

Throughout the centuries, generations of Catholics labored to create majestic cathedrals as a symbol of their faith and of their love of God. The cathedral was often the focal point of the people's life and was constructed in such a way as to instill an intense devotional atmosphere. The cathedral usually was exceptionally large since it would have to serve a parish of several thousand families.
In the 1970's, the emphasis in the Church shifted to smaller, more personal parishes. Also, where cathedrals often took decades to build, the modern church must be conceived, planned and erected within the space of a few years. Another important consideration is the cost factor. It would be financially impossible to duplicate the edifices of the past with present day construction cost. In addition, since Vatican II, the liturgical forms observed in church functions require a different concept and design in church planning.

Although many things have been altered in church architecture, the main purpose of a church is to serve as a central meeting place for a community of Catholics to profess their faith, to demonstrate their love of God, and to hear the teachings of Christ and His disciples. To enhance the effectiveness of Christian worship, it is essential that an atmosphere of devotion and reverence be established. Holy Redeemer Church strives to blend what is best and what is most feasible from both the modern and the traditional. In design, the new structure meets all the present day liturgical necessities. The congregation is brought closer to the central theme of worship - the Altar of Sacrifice - so that everyone may feel that they are a more intimate and integral part of the Mass.

An important feature of the cathedral was its beautiful, mosaic stained glass windows. These windows did much to inspire an atmosphere of reverence. Today it is possible to duplicate these marvels of medieval workmanship at a cost that is manageable for Holy Redeemer. The effect that these windows produce is awe
- inspiring. Exact copies could never be reproduced in the traditional manner and still be within the budget. However, through the use of faceted stained glass, the dream of a new church transformed by these windows is indeed a possibility.

The Conrad Pickel Studios, Inc. was commissioned to submit a proposal and a design of stained glass windows for the new Holy Redeemer Church. What they have accomplished is breathtaking. Their theme is ---

"It has pleased God the Father that in Him (Christ) all His fullness should dwell, and that through Him, He should reconcile to Himself all things, whether on the earth or in the heavens, making peace through the blood of His cross." (Col. 1, 19-20)

This message the artist has attempted to express in the design of the sanctuary of Holy Redeemer Church. From the cross of Golgotha, where Christ has offered Himself as the Lamb of God, according to the plan conceived by the Father, bright shafts of light radiate in all directions, expressing the glory of our redemption and its universality. A great number of people, shown as stylized figures with upraised arms, are standing in His light, because He said: "I am the Light of the World." And these people are becoming light themselves.

Our redemption through Christ had been promised, in types and prophecies, in the Old Testament. One of these types is the Ark of Salvation and the altar which recalls the sacrifice of Isaac which God had first ordered and then stopped. It is a reference to Christ's on the cross.

The upper area with its numerous stars, suggesting the heavenly sphere, stands in contrast to the dark blue color scheme at the bottom, suggesting
the earthly sphere. Between them Christ can be viewed as the "One Mediator between God and men." Through His sacrifice, He has brought peace to mankind, as suggested by the rainbow.

The altar, with its bright marble forming a strong contrast against the dark blue background, is the center and heart of the sanctuary. It is designed both as the sacred stone of sacrifice and table of the Holy Eucharist. It is set on this earth, and this note is reflected in the stylized design of the homes, factories and other buildings in the bottom section of the faceted glass.

On the center mullion are seen the symbols of the Father (triangle), and the Holy Spirit (dove). These two symbols, together with the figure of Christ, represent the Holy Trinity.

The materials comprising the stained glass are of the best. It is mostly imported one inch thick hand made glass, selected from a large stock of hundreds of colors available in the Pickel Studio. Epoxy-matrix, 3/4 of an inch thick is used to imbed the glass. Both sides of the panels will have imbedded an aggregate of selected colors. The divisional bars will be covered with the same materials as the panels.