

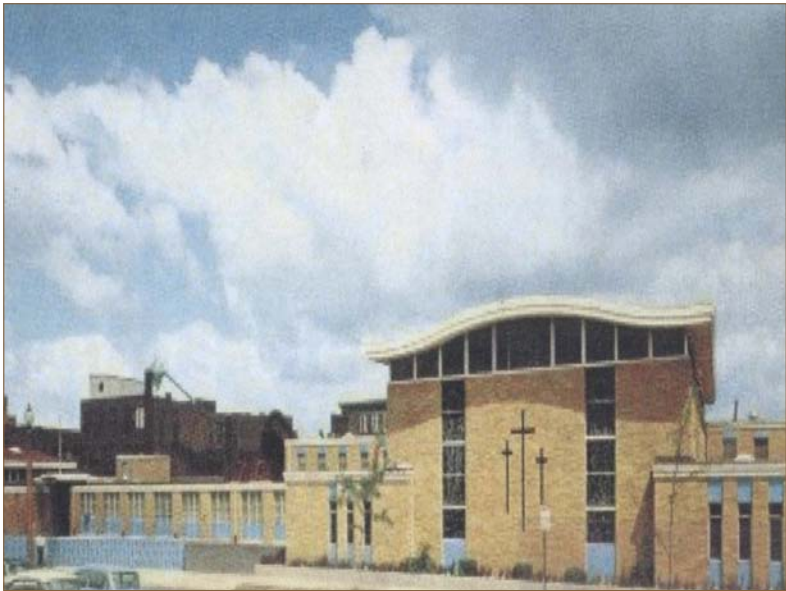
# *Communities of the Word*

STORIES OF THE CHICAGO PROVINCE



**THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT, 2003 – 2014**

*Rev. Mark Weber*



Although the Southern District is the newest of the districts in the Chicago Province, its roots go back to 1926 when the Society of the Divine Word took over the pastoral ministry of St. Nicholas parish in St. Louis. This ministry was under the North American Province at first, then under the Western Province which was based at Techny

following its creation when the single North American Province was split into the Eastern, Western and Southern Provinces in 1940. Throughout these years, individual parish ministries were entities of the provinces, not yet grouped into districts.

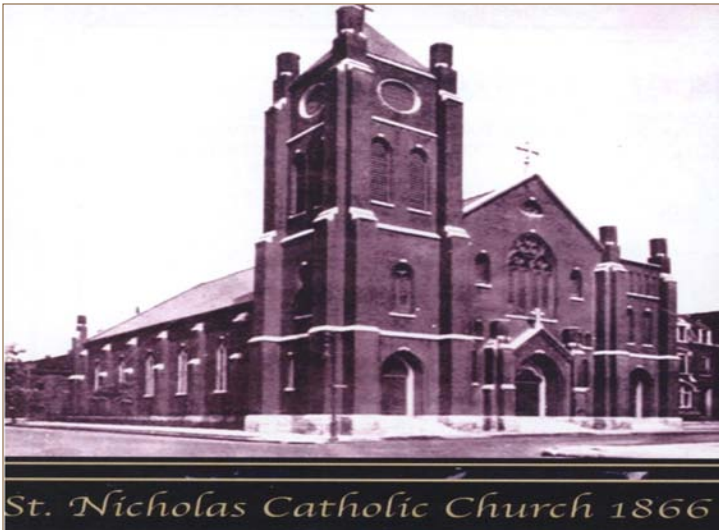
When the fourth North American province was formed in the western United States in 1964, the newly named Northern Province, based at Techny, included St. Louis as part of its one and only district: The Chicago District, later called the Chicago–St. Louis District, and eventually renamed as the Midwest District in 1982.<sup>1</sup>

When the Chicago Province was created in 1985, its Midwest District still included St. Louis. In 2003 St. Louis joined with the newly established ministry in Memphis to create the Southern District of St. Arnold.

## **ST. NICHOLAS, ST. LOUIS**

St. Nicholas Church had been built by German immigrants to St. Louis and dedicated in 1866 by Archbishop Peter Kenrick. The migration of African Americans to the northern cities following World War I caused a shift in the neighborhood, with most of the German people moving out of the neighborhood and into the suburbs. The church was located in the downtown area not far from the central railroad station. The Society was invited to take over the pastoral care of St. Nicholas Church by Archbishop John Glennon in February 1926.<sup>2</sup> The archbishop observed that Divine Word Missionaries “have particularly interested themselves and shown most gratifying results in caring for Colored people” and St. Louis “is on the way down to many of your Southern Missions.” His plan was to dedicate St. Nicholas “altogether” to the African-American mission, expecting “no opposition on the part of the few remaining white people.”

The province responded positively and soon sent Father Joseph Hölken<sup>3</sup> to become the first Divine Word pastor of St. Nicholas.<sup>4</sup> German-born Father Hölken had come to the United States in 1922, after health issues necessitated moving from his first assignment in New Guinea. He was one of the pioneers at Miramar, where he taught for four years. A few months into his assignment at St. Nicholas in November 1926, he reported that the situation wasn’t quite as rosy as the archbishop had suggested, as white parishioners complained about black servers at one of the “white” Masses. The resultant solution was



to continue with total segregation, with two Sunday Masses for the black population and two for the white population. Father Hölken lamented that “race prejudice here in St. Louis is even stronger than in the South” and placed his hope in the school as a means of educating black children and evangelizing the people in order to build up the number of black Catholics in the parish.<sup>5</sup> Already by 1930, Father Hölken reported to then Provincial Father Bruno Hagspiel:

We have quite a problem on hand with our school. Every room is full to capacity. In the first grade there are 26 children. These improvements certainly drew the attention of the colored people and I think it will put us up in their eyes much higher too. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

Like other inner-city parishes, St. Nicholas’s primary outreach of service and evangelization for many years was through its school. Within a few short years, the white flight was complete. Thus, in a pattern similar to that in other northern cities, this European immigrant parish evolved into a clearly self-identified black Catholic church. Although built by the European founders of the parish, the African-American Catholic community claimed the church and other parish buildings as its own.

Father August Reissmann, assigned as an associate pastor at St. Nicholas from 1929 to 1937, was actually the first Divine Word Missionary to serve in the African-American apostolate in the North. Assigned to the United States in 1906, he first taught at Techny in the seminary and technical school. When St. Monica parish in Chicago was entrusted to the Society in 1917 as an African-American parish, Father Reissmann served as the first pastor until 1921, at which time Father Joseph Eckert became pastor of St. Monica and later of St. Elizabeth parish.<sup>7</sup> Both Fathers Reissmann and Hölken served in African-American parishes in the South after their assignments at St. Nicholas.



Father Joseph Hölken, 1887-1959.

Father Friedrich Reichelt succeeded Father Hölken as pastor in 1931, coming to St. Nicholas after some years at Techny and a few years at Holy Ghost parish in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1937, another German, Father Carl Reinelt, became pastor, coming up north after a couple years at St. Augustine Seminary in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, where he taught in the minor seminary and was spiritual director and novice director of the Brothers. As in other African-American parishes, these German-born confreres worked to increase the number of parishioners, especially through contact with parents of the school-children. St. Nicholas parish, with its location near downtown, also began serving office workers by offering noontime Masses, devotions and confessions.

By 1942 the federal government had erected low-income public housing just north of the parish, and more people came into the neighborhood, bolstering the parish's population.<sup>8</sup> Father William Benz became the first U.S.-born pastor of St. Nicholas, serving from 1945 to 1958. Father Benz had taught at Girard, Pennsylvania, for several years, and then had worked in St. Norbert parish in Northbrook, Illinois (near Techny), and in Oakland, California, before coming to St. Louis.

When Father Jerome Brzakowski followed Father Benz as pastor in 1958, the church building was nearly a century old, and the school consisted of a two-flat home converted into four classrooms. Father Brzakowski, affectionately known as "Father Jerome" in the parish, enlisted the approval and the financial help of the archdiocese to build an entire new campus composed of a church, ten-classroom school, rectory, and a huge community center and gym. All were finished and dedicated in 1960.

At his previous assignment of St. Anselm in Chicago, Father Brzakowski had built a community center with a successful roller-skating rink. He determined that the same was needed at St. Nicholas. It served both to keep children off the streets and raised significant funds for the school. Later, a vast play area in an adjoining block was equipped and dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>9</sup> With such facilities attracting both youth and adults, St. Nicholas became well known and respected throughout the African-American community, and "it has been said that the roller rink saved the city of St. Louis from the ravages of the riots of the 1960s."<sup>10</sup>



Father Jerome Brzakowski, 1916-2002.

The school's enrollment increased to 240 by the time Father Brzakowski left St. Nicholas in 1979.<sup>11</sup> These same buildings constitute the St. Nicholas parish plant today. Father Brzakowski is still fondly remembered by older parishioners at St. Nicholas, and by confreres who had worked with him.<sup>12</sup>

The year 1960 also saw the first African-American confrere at St. Nicholas, when Father Gerald Lewis was assigned as an associate pastor. Father Lewis was also the first African-American priest to serve in the St. Louis Archdiocese.<sup>13</sup> Father John Rodney became the second, serving as associate pastor from 1963 to 1967. Father John LaBauve was based at St. Nicholas from 1980 to 1988, although his ministry was preaching parish missions and revivals throughout the country. Following Father LaBauve's death in 2008, Father Jerome LeDoux eulogized, "He quickly became known as Big John, both because of his imposing size and his king-sized appetite for storytelling and impassioned conversation. . . . Father John LaBauve's rare composite personality enabled him to become a popular and effective revivalist around the country."<sup>14</sup>

Father Donald Murrin served as pastor from 1979 to 1988, following nearly twenty years at the three African-American parishes in Chicago. Father Rick Andrus, who had served as an associate for four years at St. Elizabeth in Chicago and a year as Father Murrin's associate at St. Nicholas, became pastor in 1988 and served for 12 years. Father Stephan Brown became the first African-American pastor (2000–2003), following pastoral assignments in the U.S. Western and Southern provinces as well as at St. Rita in Indianapolis and as an associate pastor at St. Nicholas.

In 2003 the first African pastor was appointed when Father George Kintiba from the Congo arrived at St. Nicholas. Father Kintiba's first assignment after his ordination in 1996 was to the Chicago Province. He had served at St. Elizabeth in Chicago and at Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd in Trenton before coming to St. Nicholas. Father Urey Patrick Mark, the first member of the Society of the Divine Word from Liberia, was assigned to St. Nicholas following his ordination in 2007. After a few short months with Father Kintiba, Father Mark became the administrator of the parish in 2008 and later was appointed pastor, a role in which he continued until the fall of 2014 when the parish was handed back to the archdiocese.

A 1982 report stated that there then were roughly 500 parishioners, with 265 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, of whom 65 percent were not Catholic.

The report confirmed Father Hölken's earlier vision by stating that "one of the greatest strengths of the current program at St. Nicholas is the school."<sup>15</sup> The school still had 236 students in 1989 at which time there were 327 families registered in the parish, which was now 100 percent African American.<sup>16</sup> By 2003, as the neighborhood experienced some urban revitalization and new populations moved into the neighborhood, some 10 percent of the 265 registered parishioners were white.<sup>17</sup>

As was the case in dioceses throughout the United States, the Archdiocese of St. Louis was discussing possible mergers of parishes at the beginning of the new millennium. St. Nicholas was among those parishes being considered for merger. In light of those discussions and the ongoing challenge of finding the personnel to continue to staff the African-American parishes of the province, a May 2002 meeting of seven active African and African-American confreres recommended that the province pull out of St. Nicholas and hand it over to the archdiocese.<sup>18</sup>



St. Nicholas Church, School and Social Hall.

Following a 2002–2003 evaluation and assessment of the African-American apostolate in the Midwest District, the March 2003 local chapter of confreres from the Midwest District and Memphis priori-

tized the various apostolates by naming the Bowman-Francis Ministry, St. Elizabeth parish in Chicago, and St. Rita parish in Indianapolis as “primary priorities.”

This left St. Nicholas in St. Louis and St. Anselm in Chicago as “secondary priorities.”<sup>19</sup> However, the following years were shaped by the desires and talents of individual confreres available for African-American ministries and a host of other considerations, so St. Nicholas continued to be staffed by Divine Word Missionaries until 2014. With insufficient personnel available, however, the Chicago Province turned over the staffing of St. Rita in Indianapolis to the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in 2007.<sup>20</sup>

The new millennium thus saw the continuance of an ongoing debate concerning the Chicago Province’s commitment to parish ministry in the African-American apostolate. The Society’s historical presence in the African-American Catholic community was a source of pride and joy to all confreres, but there was also a movement to take on new approaches and other ministries than traditional parish work. The national scope of confreres like Father John LaBauve and the Bowman-Francis Team offered a creative approach beyond the staffing of parishes while continuing the Society’s presence in the African-American community. The danger of simply filling in holes for dioceses that face a priest shortage was recognized. On the other hand, parish ministries offered a unique opportunity to keep the Society grounded in the grassroots church, as well as providing opportunities for younger confreres to gain pastoral experience. With fewer confreres available or willing to do parish ministry, and the growing reality of multicultural parish ministry in the province, the struggle to define African-American ministry continues.

Despite changing times and demographics, St. Nicholas continues proudly to identify itself as the oldest Catholic parish serving the African-American community in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. The partial revitalization of the surrounding neighborhood has also seen some revitalization of the parish in recent years. While St. Nicholas joined with several parishes to form a common parochial school, it now hosts a preschool that continues the parish’s long tradition of outreach through education. In 2010 this essential dimension of the parish’s mission to the community was described: “The most important part in the outreach has been the preschool, which enrolls 108 children,



eighty-five percent of them from families whose income is below the poverty line.”<sup>21</sup> The roller-skating program has been renewed and again serves as a recreation center for the community. Many Divine Word confreres have served and lived at St. Nicholas over the years. Until the day in 2014 when it was handed back to the Archdiocese of St. Louis, the Divine Word legacy at St. Nicholas continued to be appreciated by the parishioners, parents of the schoolchildren and the neighboring community.



Father Urey Mark at a parish get-together.

### **MOUNT GRACE CONVENT, ST. LOUIS**

The Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration (SSpSAP—affectionately called the “Pink Sisters”) began their first foundation in the United States in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1915. U.S.-born candidates were soon applying for admission, and the community began to grow.

Mrs. Theresa Kulage, a wealthy St. Louis widow, desired to establish a convent of perpetual adoration in her native city, and visited the Philadelphia convent. She approached Archbishop Glennon and offered to sponsor an adoration convent in St. Louis. In October 1924 Archbishop Glennon wrote to the superior in Philadelphia, inviting the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters into his archdiocese. Mrs. Kulage personally oversaw the construction of the chapel, and the cornerstone was laid on October 30, 1927. Twelve Sisters were appointed for the new convent, six of them coming from Steyl, Holland, the home of their Congregation. The others came from the convent in Philadelphia.



Mount Grace Chapel sanctuary.

The blessing of the chapel and convent took place on June 7, 1928. Perpetual Adoration was begun on that day and has continued ever since.<sup>22</sup>

From the earliest days of Mount Grace Convent, Divine Word priests have served as chaplains for the Sisters. Some were assigned to the chaplaincy in addition to pastoral ministry at St. Nicholas parish, while others served full-time and resided in the chaplain's quarters at the convent. The latter were sometimes semi-retired confreres who enjoyed lessened responsibilities and more time for study and reflection. The main responsibilities of the chaplain included daily Mass and benediction, morning and midday prayers and vespers along with occasional lectures, confessions and spiritual guidance.

Father Raymond Kunkel, who served as chaplain from 1995 to 1998, noted in a description of the chaplaincy that "a major fringe benefit and attraction is the fact that he will have the time and opportunity for intellectual, cultural, and religious development. Social development will take a recess during these years of solitude and silence. . . . There has been a long procession of SVD chaplains here and all of them, without exception, have become contemplatives judging from their mystical movements after their stint here."<sup>23</sup>

Father Kunkel's predecessor as chaplain, Father Walter Bunofsky, had filled in as interim chaplain from 1984 to 1986 while continuing to help out at St. Nicholas. He went on to serve full-time as chaplain from 1986 to 1994. Father Bunofsky confirms Father Kunkel's sentiment that some of the contemplative spirituality of the Sisters seemed to

infect the chaplains serving there since it was during his appointment as chaplain that Father Bunofsky began writing poetry, some of which has been published.

Father Aloysius Biskupek, who served as chaplain from 1940 to 1955, had earlier found the time and reflective space to write several of his books on liturgy, priesthood and other themes during his years in St. Louis. He also became a well-known confessor among the archdiocesan priests.

Other confreres who have served as chaplain over the years include Fathers Gerard Heffels, Robert Myers, Lawrence Walsh, William Hegarty, Frank Mansfield (1998–2001), Felix Eckerman (2001–2006), former Superior General John Musinsky (who died on March 2, 2006, at Mount Grace, while temporarily serving as chaplain), Dennis Logue (2006–2011), and Thomas Krosnicki (2011– present).<sup>24</sup>

### **VIETNAMESE MINISTRY, ST. LOUIS**

In 1995 the Archdiocese of St. Louis requested the service of the Society of the Divine Word in the pastoral care of Vietnamese Catholics within the archdiocese. The province responded favorably, and after discussions and clarifications, an agreement was signed by Provincial Father James Bergin and Justin Cardinal Rigali of St. Louis in July 1995 for Vietnamese confrere, Father Chau Pham, to become an associate pastor at St. Pius V parish, “with an emphasis on service to the Vietnamese Community within the parish.” This one-year appointment began on September 1, 1995, with Father Pham residing at St. Nicholas. While Vietnamese Catholics were members of several parishes throughout the archdiocese, St. Pius quickly attracted a greater number once Father Pham began his ministry there.

The Vietnamese Catholics of St. Louis had organized themselves into an association called the Immaculate Heart of Mary Vietnamese Catholic Association. This organization petitioned the archdiocese for a more adequate Vietnamese parish location, and soon discussions were under way between the archdiocese and the province. The archdiocese suggested that Saint Thomas of Aquin parish might be a suitable place, with a large church building that had been renovated in 1990, but with only about 100 parishioners remaining in the transitioning neighborhood. In December 1996, a contract was signed for the Society of the Divine Word to take over administration of St. Thomas of Aquin,

with Father Chau Pham as pastor. All Vietnamese Catholics in the archdiocese were to be welcome to worship at St. Thomas, even if they did not live within the parish boundaries. However, the archdiocese noted that:

The present parish is not being suppressed; nor is a “national” parish being established. Catholics of any ethnic or racial background will continue to be welcomed at St. Thomas. Long-time parishioners are free to remain. A liturgy will be celebrated for them in English and their other pastoral needs will be met.

It also was noted that the Immaculate Heart of Mary organization would be treated as any other parish organization, with the pastor coordinating the use of facilities for all members and organizations.

The transition was made in January 1997, with Father Pham moving from St. Nicholas to reside at St. Thomas parish. Father Edward Wald joined him as an associate who could care for the smaller English-speaking population of the parish. They continued with the same parish Mass schedule, adding a Sunday Vietnamese-language Mass at noon. Later that same year, Father John Szukalski was assigned to the parish for about a year, followed by Father Hien Pham, who stayed until 2001. Father Thomas Potts replaced Father Wald in 2001, followed by Father Andrew Biller in 2002 for two years. Father Peter De Ta Vo replaced Father Pham as pastor in October 2003, joined by Father Thomas Tran in October 2004. By this time St. Thomas Aquin, like St. Nicholas, had become part of the Chicago Province’s Southern District of St. Arnold.

With the exploration of the merger of parishes throughout the Archdiocese of St. Louis at this time, a new site was proposed for the Vietnamese ministry. The neighborhood around St. Thomas had continued to deteriorate, and few Catholics lived there. On June 30, 2005, St. Thomas was closed, and on July 1, 2005, the Resurrection of Our Lord parish became the locus of the Vietnamese ministry served by the Society, with a small community of older whites remaining in the parish. On Sunday, July 3, 2005, the Vietnamese community officially moved from St. Thomas to Resurrection. Father Peter De Ta Vo became the pastor of Resurrection, followed by Father Dominic Nguyen in January 2010.



Resurrection of Our Lord Church.

Meanwhile, Father Tan Viet Nguyen served for a year as an associate in 2007. Father Binh Nguyen replaced Father Tan Viet Nguyen as associate in 2008. He was succeeded by Father Dominic Huynh Pham who was assigned there after his ordination in 2011 and who remained for two years before being assigned to the Caribbean District. Father Khien Mai Luu replaced him in early 2014.

Similar to the African-American apostolate, those involved in the Vietnamese apostolate also experienced the desire by some confreres to have a wider focus than parish ministry. Various gatherings of the Vietnamese confreres have proposed national ministries to the Vietnamese Catholic community. Two of the confreres who had served in the St. Louis Vietnamese parish have since engaged in such ministries. In 2011 Father Binh Nguyen took on the national chaplaincy of the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Society and Father Peter De Ta Vo has begun a broad ministry of liturgical consultancy, retreats, and missions on a national scale.

### **COMMUNITY LIFE IN ST. LOUIS**

Throughout most of the years, two or more confreres were usually assigned to St. Nicholas parish. Sometimes, one of these confreres also served as chaplain of the Pink Sisters at Mount Grace Convent. In the early decades, more of the mission house-type structured daily regimen seemed to dominate. A 1940 “Daily Order” for the confreres at St. Nicholas Church carried the provincial’s signature of approval:

5:40	Rise
6:00	Morning prayers, meditation
7:00	Mass
8:30	Mass for School Children. In the morning, instructions in school, etc.
12:00	Dinner
12:30	Visit to Bl. Sacrament and <i>Particular Examen</i> . Afternoon is spent in School, Office, Parish Visits.
6:00	Supper
6:30	Night Prayers, Instructions for Converts, etc.
9:30	Retire
P.S.	Monthly Recollection is First Monday of month at 5:00 p.m.

Once the various districts were established in 1964, the local community of the confreres in parish ministry became the district. District meetings and gatherings took place on an occasional or regular basis, with the confreres of St. Louis taking part first with the Midwest District and then with the Southern District.

When the Vietnamese ministry began, all the confreres working in St. Louis attempted to get together on a regular weekly basis. Thus, those at St. Nicholas, those in the Vietnamese ministry, and the Sisters' chaplain formed an informal sub-district for mutual support and fellowship that continues to the present.

### **MINISTRY IN MEMPHIS**

In 1905 the Society of the Divine Word had attempted to open an African-American mission in Merigold, Mississippi. This work was stymied, however, due to the white opposition in the area. The first Divine Word superior in the United States, Father Johannes Peil, considered Memphis, Tennessee, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, as a possible site for another attempt at African-American ministry. Vicksburg was chosen, and in 1906 St. Mary became the first parish in the South pastored by Divine Word Missionaries.<sup>25</sup>

It wasn't until Divine Word Missionary Bishop J. Terry Steib became the bishop of Memphis in 1993 that the presence of the Society of the Divine Word in Memphis was finally realized. Bishop

Steib had been provincial of the Southern Province from 1976–1983. In that year he was ordained as an auxiliary bishop of St. Louis. After ten years there he was named as the Ordinary of Memphis in 1993.

Bishop Steib made a request to the Southern Province for assistance, but received the reply that there were simply no personnel to spare. In a January 18, 2001, letter to Chicago Provincial Father Stanley Uroda, Bishop Steib commented, “I am aware that years ago, the Society considered working in Memphis as it worked its way farther south. What better way to begin the new millennium than by fulfilling and completing the dream of our SVD pioneers in the USA?” He emphasized that Divine Word Missionaries, steeped in interculturality both in their communities and their ministries, were best suited to serve the needs of the Latino, Vietnamese, Polish, Filipino, Korean and African-American Catholics of Memphis.



The Original Memphis Ministry Team with Bishop Steib and Provincial Father Uroda in 2002. (Left-to-right): Father Anthony Clark, Bishop J. Terry Steib, Fathers Frank Drzaic, Stanley Uroda, Benedict Kim and Joseph Dao Vu.

The provincial and his council responded favorably, after clarifying with the Southern Province that the confreres assigned to Memphis would remain members of the Chicago Province, while being welcome to share fraternity with geographically-closer members of the Southern Province. Potential team members and Provincial Council members made several visits to Memphis in 2001. By February 2002 an agreement was reached, and an initial three- to five-year commitment began in June 2002.

The initial team was comprised Father Joseph Dao Vu, fresh from several years in Indianapolis where he had organized the Vietnamese Catholics while based in St. Rita parish; Father Anthony Clark, who had been pastor of St. Rita before coming to Memphis; Father Frank Drzaic, who had been doing primarily Hispanic ministry at parishes in Chicago; and Father Benedict Kim, a Korean-born confrere who began his first assignment in the Chicago Province at St. Rita in Indianapolis.

### Ministries and Parishes in Memphis

Father Joseph Dao Vu was named pastor of Sacred Heart parish with approximately 800 Latino, 300 Anglo, and 250 Vietnamese parishioners. Father Frank Drzaic was assigned as an associate at Sacred Heart for the Spanish-speaking community. Father Dao Vu was also named as the first praeses of the new Memphis community. Father Miguel Ruiz transferred to the Chicago Province after some years in pastoral ministry in his native Argentina and joined the team for Spanish-language ministry at Sacred Heart. Father Dominic Nguyen came to Memphis and worked at Sacred Heart in the English, Spanish, and Vietnamese languages from 2003 to 2009, especially focusing on the Hispanic group when both Fathers Drzaic and Ruiz moved on in 2004.

In the first year, Father Clark was appointed as pastor of Holy Names of Jesus and Mary parish, predominantly an African-American parish. Later he was transferred to St. Joseph parish with a mixture of old-time white members, African Americans and Hispanics. He was named by Bishop Steib as diocesan director of multicultural ministries. He also served as praeses from 2005 to 2008.

In November 2003, four Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters began to work in the two parishes staffed by Divine Word Missionaries and have continued their work in Memphis in various pastoral, educational, and health-care ministries.

### The St. John's Experience

A native Korean who had studied theology and was ordained in Australia, Father Benedict Kim began a ministry to the Korean Catholic community of Memphis, which gathered as a community of faith without a parish affiliation. Father Kazimierz Abrahamczyk was transferred to the Chicago Province in 2005, after years in Korea as



a formator and regional superior, with the specific mission of taking over the Korean ministry when Father Kim returned to Korea. Father Abrahamczyk soon was asked to minister to the Polish community as well and was appointed pastor of the multicultural parish of St. John in 2007.

### Other Ministries

Father Simon Thoi Hoang's first assignment after ordination began at Sacred Heart and later shifted to some campus ministry and serving the Hispanic population at Ascension parish (with a diocesan pastor) from 2007 until 2011.

Father Chacko Parekatt, who had transferred to the Chicago Province in 2008 after a variety of ministries, including many years in his native India, engaged in nursing home ministry at two locations from 2008 until 2011. Father Hien Pham finished several years in the Vietnamese ministry in Indianapolis in 2011 and came to Memphis to take up Father Parekatt's nursing home ministry. Father Tan Nguyen came from a Pittsburgh hospital chaplaincy to take up a similar ministry in Memphis in 2011.

The nature of the ministries and the names of the Divine Word Missionaries assigned to Memphis shifted significantly over the first ten years of this new ministry. The Memphis parish ministries reflect the growing phenomenon of multicultural parishes across North America. With constantly shifting migrations of people, the older model of single ethnic parishes is giving way to parishes composed of multiple cultural and linguistic groups. A good example of this is Sacred Heart parish in Memphis with its three distinct languages of English Spanish, and Vietnamese. This parish brings out the new challenges of trying to form one parish community from such distinct cultures. Even among the Spanish-speaking population there is great diversity with people from Mexico and various countries of Latin America, each with their unique cultural background and special devotions and patron saints.

Movement from merely being a multicultural parish to becoming a single genuinely intercultural community is a lofty goal. As a parishioner stated in 2004 at the Lunar New Year celebration at Sacred Heart, "We are undoing the Tower of Babel. . . . Though we hail from various parts of the world, when we pray and sing together in our respective tongues, it's all still one voice."<sup>26</sup> Father Dominic Nguyen,

who preached at the same celebration, remarked: “You don’t need to go to Rome to experience the universal Church; you can just come to Sacred Heart.”<sup>27</sup>

### Ministry Team

A new team approach to community life and ministry in Memphis had been decided upon from the beginning. It was agreed that all the confreres working in Memphis would live together in community. A former rectory of a closed parish—known as the “Franciscan House” because of its previous occupants—was offered by Bishop Steib to the Chicago Province for their living quarters. The plan was for the confreres to form a community apart from their pastoral work, with clear expectations of being present for common prayer, meals and socializing at established times. Those with salaries from their ministries would support the functioning of the house. The members would take care of cooking, cleaning and the upkeep of the house themselves.

The community house provided an environment for the mentoring and support of several confreres in temporary vows, who did their Cross-cultural Training Program (CTP) or other temporary ministerial experiences in Memphis. Having a single community house also opened the way for some confreres to do ministry other than parochial ministry as pastor or associate. Mexican-born Father Carlos Paniagua-Monroy, having worked in Hispanic ministry in New Jersey and the Chicago area for his first assignments, joined the Memphis community while serving as diocesan director of Hispanic ministry, organizing the Hispanic ministry in several parishes, and engaging in prison chaplaincy from 2005 to 2011. He also served as praeses of the Memphis house from 2008 to 2011.

Father Antonio Romo-Romo came in 2011 and began his work in the Hispanic ministry at Sacred Heart and St. Joseph parishes in 2011, following his first assignment of two terms as vocation director.

This arrangement began to break down about 2008 when, one by one, the pastors felt the need to live at their respective parish rectories in order to be present for emergency pastoral needs as well as for security purposes. However, the commitment for all confreres in Memphis to engage in community life was maintained, with meals, prayer and socializing several times per week at the central Divine Word residence until about 2013. While some of the confreres living in the house appreciated a home apart from their ministry site, others expressed security

concerns living in a poor neighborhood in which they had no pastoral engagement and were isolated from neighborhood involvement.

The Memphis project initially began as a distinct entity directly under the province, rather than as part of a district, to keep it free from the “embedded structures” of the Midwest District.<sup>28</sup> After the team sorted things out over the first year, the Provincial Council decided that it would be best to create a new district composed of Memphis and St. Louis, rather than expand the Midwest District into such a large geographical area. Hence, the Southern District of St. Arnold was born in 2003. In 2007 the Provincial Council transferred \$33,500 from the Midwest District’s funds to the Southern District, based on a formula taking into account the number of members who had contributed to the Midwest District funds and now were in the Southern District.

**APPENDIX**

**Southern District Superiors**

Father Joseph Dao Vu	2003–2005
Father George Kintiba	2005–2008
Father Anthony Clark	2008–2011
Father Kazimierz Abrahamczyk	2011–2014
Father Thomas Krosnicki	2014–

The District Council has consistently had members from both Memphis and St. Louis.

**Members of the Southern District, December 2014**

*Memphis*

Father Kazimierz Abrahamczyk	Pastor of St. John
Father Anthony Clark	Pastor of St. Augustine
Father Simon Thoi Hoang	Pastor of Sacred Heart
Father Antonio Romo-Romo	Pastor of St. Joseph

*St. Louis*

Brother Larry Camillieri	In Residence at Resurrection of Our Lord
Father Thomas Krosnicki	Chaplain of Mount Grace Convent
Father Khien Mai Luu	Associate Pastor of Resurrection of Our Lord
Father Dominic Nguyen	Pastor of Resurrection of Our Lord

## NOTES

1. Divine Word Missionaries staffed St. Mark parish across the river from St. Louis in Venice, Illinois, from 1978 to 1994. Since it was part of the Midwest District, its history is included in the Midwest District history.

2. Archbishop Glennon, letter to Provincial Father Peter Janser, February 6, 1926, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

3. Father Hölken's name is also spelled Holken or Hoelken in various documents.

4. By 1926 there were seven African-American missions established in the South: Vicksburg, Jackson, Meridian, Greenville, and Bay St. Louis in Mississippi; plus Little Rock, Arkansas, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama. St. Elizabeth in Chicago and St. Nicholas in St. Louis were established in the North.

5. Father Hölken, letter to Provincial Father Peter Janser, November 15, 1926, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

6. Father Hölken, letter to Provincial Father Bruno Hagspiel, October 4, 1930, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

7. See the Midwest District history for more details. An obituary for Father Reissmann stated, "At the request of Archbishop George Mundelein, the Divine Word Fathers were entrusted to the care of St. Monica parish on Chicago's south side. In October 1917 Father Reissmann became pastor of St. Monica and won many converts to the church. During his administration, he rebuilt the church and made improvements in the school."

8. St. Nicholas 142nd anniversary booklet, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

9. Press release for Father Jerome Brzakowski's silver jubilee, undated but presumably 1970, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

10. Article on Father Jerome Brzakowski's fiftieth jubilee titled, "Inner City Priest Returns Home to Detroit to Celebrate Golden Jubilee," 1995, source not listed. Possibly it was a press release from the Chicago Province Communication Office.

11. *St. Louis Review*, January 5, 1979.

12. An e-mail from Father Thomas Krosnicki of January 5, 2012, notes, "One of the first places the theologians from Techny did summer ministry was at St. Nicholas in St. Louis. Under the

direction of Father Jerome Brzakowski we did home visits—including climbing up and down the notorious high-rises, now demolished and replaced by nice family homes. An anecdote: Cardinal Ritter used to stop frequently at St. Nicholas in Jerome’s days. Diocesans got a little envious until they found out that the parish was just a convenient place for a pit-stop.”

13. *St. Louis Review*, January 5, 1979, cited above. Already in 1939 Provincial Father Hugo Aubry had suggested to Archbishop Glennon that the Society of the Divine Word could expand its mission in St. Louis, and asked if he would “consider it feasible to have one or two colored priests working in Saint Louis since I have two good men who can be spared for this field.” Neither the Chicago Province archives nor the archives of the Archdiocese of St. Louis have any reply from the archbishop on file.

14. *Louisiana Weekly*, July 28, 2008.

15. Report to the Provincial Chapter, approved by the Midwest District Council, March 29, 1982, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

16. Secretariat for the Apostolates, “Survey of St. Nicholas,” dated August 1, 1989, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

17. “Evaluations and Assessment on SVD Midwest Black Apostolate, 2002–2003,” Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.

18. Meeting of Fathers Stephan Brown, Anthony Clark, Kenneth Hamilton, Melvin James, George Kintiba, Charles Smith and Chester Smith on May 16, 2002, in Los Angeles: “We feel that after seventy-six years it is time for the SVD to pull out of St. Nicholas. This would take effect July of 2003.”

19. “Midwest-Memphis Local Chapter,” March 3, 2003, Chicago Province Archives, Techny.

20. Personnel planning and availability have always impacted parishes. A national committee on the Direct Mission Apostolate was appointed in 1975, in part to coordinate parish personnel planning across all the North American provinces, but it was soon disbanded. When the Chicago Province was instituted in 1985, it had a Secretariat for the Apostolate that was to plan for parish personnel. It, too, disappeared after a few years. Planning for personnel remains a difficult task, dependent upon the needs of the province and the abilities and desires of the individual confreres.

21. *St. Louis Review*, January 8, 2010.

22. Holy Spirit Perpetual Adoration Sisters website: <http://www.mountgraceconvent.org/history.html>.

23. “Mount Grace Convent of St. Louis—The Chaplain’s Ministry: A Job Description,” March 1998 (initialed “RJK”—presumably Father Raymond Kunkel).

24. The specific assignment to Mount Grace as chaplain was listed in the *Catalogus* starting in 1990. Before that, the chaplain was simply listed under St. Nicholas, as “at large” in the district, under Techny, or someplace else. Unfortunately, the Sisters at Mount Grace do not have a complete record of the chaplains who served the community.

25. Ernest Brandewie, *In the Light of the Word: Divine Word Missionaries in North America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), pp. 188-189.

26. *Southern Living*, February 2004, quoting Sacred Heart parish secretary Louise Cayo.

27. *Central City Appeal*, February 1, 2004.

28. Father Stanley Uroda and the Provincial Council, “Preparing for Memphis,” Position Paper, February 22, 2002, Chicago Province Archives, Techny, Illinois.