

About 59 years ago, Maria Regina Parish did not exist. It was ultimately located on a five acre lot in the center of a residential area known as Johnson Ranch, close to the Gardena Valley Airport. The parish was established by Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, who gave it the name 'Maria Regina', "Mary Queen of Heaven." The name was chosen because Pope Pius XII had added to the many titles of Mary, the Mother of God, the honor of "Mary, Queen of Heaven" in 1954. Maria Regina Parish includes the faithful from North Gardena, Hawthorne and Los Angeles County.



Cardinal McIntyre exercised great leadership in Southern California and is still recognized for his courage in establishing and building so many parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Cardinal McIntyre, a New Yorker and Wall Street genius, appointed Fr. Michael Casey as the first Pastor of Maria Regina. Fr. Casey was given 5 acres of land, vacant property right next to a large area of wetlands that extended to Western Avenue to the East. When they had heavy rains, many frogs appeared.

1956

The Parish was formed in 1956 to accommodate the increasing number of Catholic families moving to Gardena.

The Parish was formed in 1956 in the Northwest area of the City of Gardena at a time when the community was growing rapidly. Another Catholic Church, along with a Catholic school, to accommodate the increasing number of families who were coming to live in Gardena. The groundbreaking ceremony for the new Maria Regina Church and School took place in August 1957. Fr. Casey blessed the site and turned the first spade of earth in the presence of approximately 300 parishioners. For the first two years, while the church was being built in 1957 and 1958, masses were celebrated in Latin at 7:30a.m., 9:00a.m., 10:30a.m., and noon at Serra High School on Van Ness Avenue just a few blocks south of the proposed church site. Masses were held in the hall with the parishioners using folding chairs.

Fr. Michael Casey came to Maria Regina as its first and founding Pastor in 1956. He was born on July 1, 1910, in Ballyorgan County in Limerick, Ireland. His priesthood studies were at Mungret College in County Limerick. He also attended St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park, California. And, he attended St. Thomas Seminary in Denver, Colorado. Fr. Casey was ordained on June 3, 1939 and served at St. Emydius, Lynwood; St. Athanasius, Long Beach; St. Boniface, Anaheim; and Holy Cross and Ascension, Los Angeles. His brother, Fr. Patrick Casey was also a Los Angeles Diocesan Priest and died in 1976. Fr. Casey and the founding Parishioners (some of whom are still around) built the church, school, convent and rectory. Fr. Casey envisioned a church to hold 800 to 1000 people and a school to eventually cover kindergarten through 8th grade. The church used the same schedule of masses as they did at Serra High School. This church building, however, was planned for eventual conversion to a parish auditorium.

On September 15, 1958, the school opened, and covered the first four grades. Desiring a convent on the West Coast, which would also serve as a 'stop over' between Europe, New England and Hawaii, the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and of Perpetual Adoration, [SS.CC] responded to repeated requests from the Hierarchy of Los Angeles. Reverend Mother Mary, our Mother, selected Maria Regina Parish as their new field of apostolate. The Sisters perform two primary functions: Adoration and Education. The Sisters staffed the School and began to serve the needs of the growing school population (reference: "A Century in Hawaii 1859-1959," published by the SS.CC.). Maria Regina was the first Foundation of the Congregation in California and their first School in the Western United States. The Sisters also taught at Bishop Amat Memorial High School in La Puente, California. They are also represented in Fall River, Massachusetts. Their Congregation was founded in France by Mother Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie. The Novitiate,

On September 15, 1958, Maria Regina Catholic School opened its doors to the first four grades.

Provincialate and House of Studies are located in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Generalate of the Congregation is in Rome. The Sisters were housed in an apartment building across the street from the Church, until their convent was completed. Their faith and dedication (many of whom have gone to the Lord) contributed immensely to the faith and character formation of thousands of young people, from families of the Gardena area. Their reward was not in the form of pay checks and retirement policies and huge benefits, but the love of God and the promise of spiritual treasures.

Before Maria Regina came into existence, St. Anthony of Padua was the local Church. When Maria Regina Church and the school were finished, people moved from St. Anthony's because there were boundaries for each Parish at the time. Children attending St. Anthony's School were automatically transferred to Maria Regina. The new Parish borders were as follows: El Segundo Blvd., Compton Blvd., (now known as Marine Ave), Prairie Avenue, and Normandie Ave. Altar Servers were well trained by the Sisters. Those were the days of the altar rail, Communion in the mouth, distributed only by the Priest, with the altar boy alongside, holding the Paten under each person's chin to catch fragments that might fall.

Several groups were formed, including the Holy Name Society, Ladies Altar Society, Mission Circle, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Youth Groups to help raise funds for the construction of the parish hall, school, lunch area and convent.

The Parish Hall was built by volunteer labor of the parishioners of Gardena. Modern day Parish Community is deeply indebted to the faith, sacrifice and generosity of those early parishioners. Construction of the new Parish Hall and adjoining lunch shelter took place in July 1968. The Hall accommodated 550 people and included a stage, storage areas and a kitchen. The lunch shelter served the pupils of Maria Regina School.

Obviously, this large undertaking of Church, School, Hall, Lunch Area and Convent raised a large debt, so there were many fundraising activities. Several groups were formed, including the Holy Name Society, Ladies Altar Society, Mission Circle, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Youth Groups, etc. The 7:30a.m. Mass was changed to 8:00a.m. On the first Sunday of each month, the men of the Holy Name Society gathered outside the front of the Church and processed in ahead of the Priest. After Mass, a breakfast and business meeting was held to formulate activities to benefit the Parish. In 1966 Mr. and Mrs. Frank Weidenbener were very active and among many others. Don O'Neill was recruited as an Usher, Holy Name Officer, Committee Chairman and Assistant in organizing staff fiestas and other fund raising activities. Fr. Casey was a very frugal

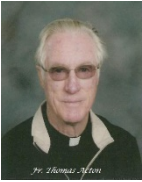
manager and prudent with church funds, so a lot of work was done by parishioners, including a new water main, a concrete driveway between the Convent and the School and repairs to the paved grounds. He believed in turning off lights unless they were absolutely necessary so it was always dark around the property at night. You would often see Fr. Casey walking around the grounds wearing his cassock and biretta.

The first Mass was held in the new Church in May 1958, honoring Mother's Day. The official dedication was postponed until His Eminence; James Francis Cardinal McIntyre could officiate. At that time, the Cardinal was one of only four Americans holding Catholic Church's second highest position. In December 1958 the Cardinal made a rare visit to Gardena for the dedication. The Gardena Knights of Columbus greeted His Eminence at 10:15 a.m. with their Honor Guard. With some 1200 in attendance, the Cardinal assisted at the dedicatory High Mass at 10:30 a.m., with Fr. Casey as Celebrant, Fr. Patrick Casey, Sub Deacon, Fr. Patrick Cleary, Deacon, Fr. Donald Kulleck, Master of Ceremonies, Monsignor Edward V. Wade preached the sermon, Fr. William Duggan and Fr. Patrick Redahan were Chaplains to His Eminence, Edward McManus directed the Parish Choir, with James Corcoran at the Allen organ.

Women who helped shape our community included Sr. Marie Elizabeth as the first principal.

Starting in 1957, Maria Regina had a Council of Catholic Women, who put on an Annual Fashion Show, sponsored by many local businesses and social patrons, who were no doubt parishioners. Sr. Marie Elizabeth was the first School Principal. In 1962, tuition for the entire school year was \$162. In the late 60's, school enrollment increased so rapidly that they began to have 2 classes for each grade. (Grade one-one 'S' and one 'M'. 'S' stood for Sister and 'M' for a lay teacher.) They alternated each year. If you had a Sister one year, you had a lay teacher the next.

Fr. Casey died on Good Friday, March 25, 1978, at the age of 67. He had requested retirement the previous year, but generously continued to serve as Pastor in obedience to the will of the Ordinary at the time, namely Cardinal Timothy Manning. Monsignor Gary Bauler, the Archdiocesan Director of Vocations (at that time) was Administrator until July 1, 1978. Fr. Thomas Acton was appointed as the second Pastor by Cardinal Manning, to succeed Fr. Casey.



Fr. Acton came from Northern Ireland in 1953. He attended St. John's Seminary in Camarillo for his four years of Theology, 1953 to 1957. He was ordained on May 3, 1957. His first assignment was at St. Bridget of Sweden in Van Nuys, a fairly new Parish. He also served at St. Pius 10th in Santa Fe Springs; St. Anthony's in El Segundo, and was at Mother of Sorrows in Los Angeles for eleven years before coming to Maria Regina on July 1, 1978. He was inspired by the faith of the ethnically diverse Maria Regina Community and was responsible for introducing the Spanish Mass, which is extremely well attended. He is admired for his friendly, loyal and supportive attitude towards the members of the Parish.

During Fr. Acton's 25 years as our Pastor, we celebrated Maria Regina's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1981. We were then a vital community of some 1200 families and a School of 300 students, serving as an important religious, social and educational institution in the Gardena area. At the Silver Jubilee Mass of Thanksgiving, with Fr. Acton as Celebrant, His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Manning as the Principal Concelebrant assisted by Fr. Allan Roberts, Associate, Fr. Luis Ayo, in residence, were other invited concelebrating clergy. The Parish Choirs (adult and children) were directed by Sr. Marie Dominic, who along with St. Marie Therese, were the organists, Mr. Patrick Sheaffer and Mr. Miguel Hong played guitars, Mr. John Wyper and Mr. Geoffrey Waring played the trumpets and Mr. Lewis Clapp was the Cantor. The Parish Silver Jubilee Committee, with Ms. Patricia Galloway as the Chairperson, handled all the preparations for the Mass and reception that followed.

In 1981, Harold Umbarger, who had not played the piano for thirty years, was encouraged by Fr. Allan Roberts (Associate Pastor) to play the organ. He had never played the organ before, so he had to practice a lot. Harold was quite a blessing to Maria Regina. He played weddings, funerals, quinceañeras, and, of course, our liturgies until his death one Saturday afternoon in 2008. He had an admiring and appreciative audience who stayed to listen when he played a selection of hymns after Mass.

Other important milestones include:

- In 1986, the Korean Community of 600 families came to share Maria Regina's facilities and joined our multi-ethnic family. In 2004, they moved to their new Church on Artesia Blvd. between Van Ness Avenue and Western Avenue.
- Ramon Nuñez served as Parish Administrator from 1995 to 2004 and continues to serve as DRE for the Parish.
- Mrs. Maria Nuñez has been the director of the Saturday Religious Education classes for the Spanish Community.
- Fr. Acton served as Pastor for twenty-five years until 2003. In that year, Cardinal Roger Mahony granted his request for retirement at the age of 69. Fr. Acton is now Pastor Emeritus, and continues to live in the rectory and assists at various parish events and Liturgies. The Parish retirement committee, with Kim Nguyen (the Deacon's wife) as chairperson prepared a beautiful mass, followed by a reception for Fr. Acton in June 2003.
- The late Bruce Cannon and his wife Pat came to Maria Regina in 1973. Bruce was an Usher, a Lector and a member of the Parish Choir. He led two Bible classes and then led an R.C.I.A group. Pat has worked at the School for 33 years.

IN 1981, MARIE REGINA
CELEBRATED THEIR TWENTY-
FIFTH ANNIVERSARY.

School Principals:

Principal	Dates	Principal	Dates	Principal	Dates
Sister Mary Elizabeth SS.CC	1958 – 1966	Sister Julie Louise SS.CC.	1976 – 1982	Sister Barbara Courtney	1988 – 2001
Sister Mary Paul SS.CC	1966 – 1968	Sister Regina Mary SS.CC.	1982 to 1987	Mr. Raymond Saborio	2001 – 2005
Sister Jane Francis SS.CC.	1968 – 1976	Mrs. Penelope Mirkovich	1987 to 1988	Mrs. Lynette Lino	2005 – present
Sister Julie Louise SS.CC.	1976 – 1982				

The other Sisters of The Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary included:

- Sister Mary Lucy
- Sister Bernadette
- Sister Mary Josephine
- Sister Marie Therese
- Mother Mary Regis
- Sister Mary Pascale
- Sister Mary Leobin
- Sister Mary Charlotte
- Sister Jeanne
- Sister Joyce Marie
- Sister Julianna
- Sister Immaculata
- Mother Mary Gertrude
- Sister Mary Patrick
- Sister Rita
- Sister Rose Virginia
- Sister Agatha
- Sister Mary Christine
- Sister Mary Constance
- Sister Mary Dominic
- Sister Theodora
- Sister Dorothy
- Sister Carmela

There were many Associate Pastors and Resident Priests at Maria Regina over the years.

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| 1. Fr. Michael Casey 1956-1978
Pastor | 11. Fr. H. DeJonghe 1973-1976 | 21. Fr. Francis Holecek 1984 | 31. Fr. Daniel Perez 1997 |
| 2. Fr. D. Kulleck 1958-1959 | 12. Fr. C. Mauricio 1976-1978 | 22. Fr. Joseph P. Lee 1985-1986 | 32. Fr. David Gallrdo 1997 |
| 3. Fr. Warren Tierney 1959-1961 | 13. Fr. Peter Ly 1976-1980 | 23. Fr. Modesto Perez 1985-1987 | 33. Fr. Francisco Nahoe 1999 |
| 4. Fr. John. O'Connor 1961-1965 | 14. Fr. Ted Ley 1977-1982 | 24. Fr. Myles Roban 1991 | 34. Fr. Mark Jeong 1999 |
| 5. Fr. Peter Moran 1965-1969 | 15. Fr. Gary Bauler 1978 Administrator | 25. Fr. Michael Carcerano 1987-1996 | 35. Fr. Manuel Magallanes 2001-2003 |
| 6. Fr. Rodolfo Napial 1969-1970 | 16. Fr. Thomas Acton 1978-2003 Pastor | 26. Fr. Francis Ty Bui 1989 | 36. Fr. Peter Mau CSSR |
| 7. Fr. Havel 1970 | 17. Fr. Luis Ayo 1978- 1982 | 27. Fr. Chau Bau C SSR 1990 | 37. Fr. Frank Kelly |
| 8. Fr. Joseph Donaghue 1970 | 18. Fr. Allan Roberts 1980-1985 | 28. Fr. Richard. Albarano 1992 | 38. Fr. Jesse Galaz |
| 9. Fr. L. Kolberg 1970-1972 | 19. Fr. David Lysik 1982 | 29. Fr. Alex Chung 1992-1993 | 39. Fr. Bertrand Clemens |
| 10. Fr. John Ratigan 1972-1974 | 20. Fr. Anthony Mortell 1983-1984 | 30. Fr. Paul Seo 1993-1999 | 40. Fr. Michael Nocita |
| | | | 41. Fr. Mike Java 2003 |
| | | | 42. Fr. Leo Alberg 2004– Pastor |

Parishioners who had vocations to the Priesthood, Brotherhood, or Religious Life included:

- Fr. Loren Riebe
- Fr. Gary Riebe

Sr. Christine of Mary, OCD, came from a small town called Dalat.

• Sr. Christine of Mary, OCD, came from a small town called Dalat, on top of a mountain in Vietnam. She joined Maria Regina Parish and developed her vocation, initially supported by Fr. Acton and Fr. Michael Carcerano. When she was about 11 years old, her family was in danger from the advancing Viet Cong Army. After a short stay with relative in Saigon, which fell right after they left, they fled to San Francisco. All of the family were baptized into the Catholic Faith by their Redemptories uncle, thereby becoming first generation Catholics. At first she spoke only Vietnamese and French. She attributes her unaccented English to lessons and watching "Star Trek." After

graduating from college, her vocation came to her while reading the Scriptures. She was very happy but at first her mother was very upset (she was the youngest of eight children) After a long search, she visited the Alhambra Monastery and found that it was just the place she had been visualizing for years. Sister

Christine was the youngest nun in 2002. She was the cook for five years and now is the "Altar Bread" Sister, responsible for packing shipping the bread to parishes and keeping the books as a cloistered nun at the Sacred Heart Retreat House in Alhambra, where you can be sure she includes all of us in her prayers.

- Brother Greg Giannoni OFM Greg, son of Raymond and Evelyn Giannoni, long time parishioners of Maria Regina, takes care of the Shrines in the Holy Land.
- Deacon Van Nguyen
- Deacon Ignatius Suh

Firsts for Maria Regina Church include:

- First person baptized was Christopher Allan Bradley 1956.
- First Marriage in 1954 was Edward C. Scanlin and Florence U. Shoffner

Some founding parishioners were...

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| • Arlene and Don O'Neill | • Nancy and John Ryan | • Art and Bonnie Ritter | • Al and Dorothy Kipiec |
| • Elaine and John "Ken" Jost | • Mary and Henry Zbojniec | • Dan and Louise Sullivan | • Van and Lous Caputo |
| • Pauline Thomas | • Manuel and Gabina Fajardo | • Vince and Betty Bennet | • Joe and Mary Daro |
| • Pat and Phyllis Meagher | • Rose and Anthony Barone | • Ted and Bea Turi | • Charles and Virginia Colvin |
| • Art and Donna Franson | • Donald and Amelia Guyse | • Bob and Barbara Langford | • Lionel and Helen Rideaux |
| • Jim and Peggy Scottini | • Robert and Ann Plourde | • Sam and Ann Aspaas | • John and BeareiceHeil |
| • Albert "Johnny" & Barbara Jonhson | • Helen and Emelie Brisson | • 'Chuck' and Peggy Nader | • Edward and Mary McManus |
| • Robert and Catalina Kirst | • Clarence and Mary Murphy | • Max and Bonnie Batchelder | • Joseph 'Bruce' and Eleanor Dobson |



After Fr. Acton retired in 2003, Fr. Mike Java served as Parish Administrator for about a year, and then Fr. Leo Alberg, after two years as Administrator, was appointed third Pastor of Maria Regina by Cardinal Roger Mahony. Fr. Leo Alberg was born in Montebello, California. He is one of 6 children in the Alberg Family. When he was seven years of age, the family moved to Independence in Missouri where Fr. Leo attended St. Mary's Elementary School and St. Mary's High School until 1979, when the family returned to the Los Angeles area. Fr. Leo graduated from Arcadia High School and then attended Cal Poly Pomona and Mount San Jacinto College, where he received an AA in Theater Arts. Fr. Leo studied at St. John's Seminary College in Camarillo where he was granted a BA in Philosophy. Then he attended St. John's Seminary from which he graduated in 1990. For a year he did a specialization in Hospital Ministry and was ordained for Los Angeles in 1991. Fr. Leo has had a variety of assignments since his ordination. His first assignment was to St. Robert Bellarmine in Burbank followed by St. John Fisher in Palos Verdes. Next he was named

Administrator of Ascension Church. Then for a few months he was assigned to Sacred Heart in Lancaster, returning to the Los Angeles area at Nativity El Monte and St Raphael's in Santa Barbara. After having seen all the regions of the Archdiocese, Fr. Leo was assigned to Maria Regina in Gardena, as the Administrator Pro Tem and named Pastor on July 1, 2006. Fr. Leo made some building improvements in the gathering area, for the safety of the school children and to encourage the parishioners to stay and fellowship after mass. In the warm tradition of Maria Regina Parish, the people have welcomed and supported Fr. Leo in his genuine efforts to continue the growth of this wonderful faith community, in a small corner of this vast archdiocese.

In July 2012, we received Fr. Tran Sang as our 4th Pastor in Maria Regina Church.