



History of The Church of St. Kieran, Coconut Grove, FL

The formal document erecting the parish of St. Kieran was issued by Bishop Coleman Carroll on October 31, 1967 to the pastor, Fr. Martin Cassidy. It delineated the boundaries of the new parish which was carved out of the Gesu and SS. Peter and Paul Church territories. It lies L-shaped along Biscayne Bay from SW 22nd Ave to the Miami River and extends inland to Coral Way.

Masses were first celebrated in the chapel of the Assumption Academy with hopes of establishing the new parish there. This was not to be. The Assumption Chapel was to become St. Jude Melkite Church. After the sale of the Academy Chapel to the Melkites, Masses were held in the La Salle High School Cafeteria.

The dedication of the Church of St. Kieran by the Most Reverend Edward A. McCarthy, Archbishop of Miami, took place on December 8, 1979 when Fr. Daniel Barrett was pastor. At the dedication Father Barrett remarked: "For twelve years you worked and prayed and persevered to make this day possible. The building of the present church was preceded by 12 years of growing pains which included a separation from the mother churches, various transplantings, the move to the present site and the building of the church". Archbishop McCarthy in his letter for the dedication remarked: "After some difficulty and frustrations your perseverance has paid off. Now you have a beautiful, spacious church in which to praise God..."

The former pastors are: Fr. Martin Cassidy, Bishop John Fitzpatrick, Fr. Donald Connally, Fr. Antonio Navarrete, Bishop Rene Gracida, Fr. Francis Lechiara, Fr. Daniel Barrett, Fr. Vincent Duffy, Bishop Emilio Allue, Fr. Javier Aracil, and Fr. James Curran. The present pastor is Fr. Donald Zarkoski. The parish has been a source of bishops for the church and the list of former pastors includes three pastors who were elevated to the episcopacy: Bishop John Fitzpatrick, Bishop Rene Gracida and Bishop Emilio Allue.

The 10th anniversary and the mortgage burning took place on Sunday, December 10, 1989. On this occasion, Mass was celebrated by Bishop Augustin Roman and a festive dinner was held at the Intercontinental Hotel. Building a new church put the fledgling parish heavily in debt. Two men responsible for the completion of St. Kieran Church and the subsequent retirement of the mortgage were Fr. Daniel Barrett and Father Vincent Duffy. The church was built under the direction of Father Barrett who organized a pledge system to help payoff the debt. In July 1984, he was replaced by Fr. Duffy who continued the work. Within five years the debt was paid and Fr. Duffy was transferred on special assignment to South America.

The Salesian Fathers came to the parish in 1984 at the invitation of Archbishop Edward McCarthy. The first Salesian pastor was Fr. Vincent Duffy. He was succeeded by Bishop Allue, Fr. Aracil, Fr. Curran and Fr. Zarkoski. The present rectory was once the convent for the Sisters who staffed La Salle High School. When the church was built, the convent was converted to a rectory for priests assigned to the church and to pastoral care at Mercy Hospital and at La Salle High School. The former rectory was at 2355 South Miami Avenue which is now the home of a parishioner.

As the years went by many Spanish speaking people joined the parish and they are now the majority. At first, the influx was heavily Cuban but now there are peoples from all over Central and South America and the Caribbean. The integration was not without its problems. However, it was always peaceful, respectful and friendly and we continue to grow into a unified faith community. Many of the Spanish speaking parishioners are past pupils of the Salesian schools in their country of origin. They are attracted to this parish because of their Salesian

heritage and their desire to keep close ties within the Salesian Family. The parish extends pastoral care to these past pupils through the Asociación de la Familia Salesiana and promotes devotion to St. John Bosco and to Don Bosco's madonna, Mary, the Help of Christians.

An important project was the establishment of Misión La Purisima by former pastor Bishop Emilio Allué. The mission was established to provide pastoral service to a large group of Nicaraguans who lived in the northernmost boundary. An area between two apartment buildings covered by a tent serves as a place of worship for the celebration of Mass. An apartment is rented to serve as a meeting/prayer room and sacristy. The mission serves as a center providing pastoral services and a place of Christian Unity. Many of the children enrolled in the parish CCD program have their contact with St. Kieran Church through Misión La Purisima.

The parish has an active CCD program staffed by volunteers under a CCD Director. In the past few years, attendance has tripled. There are 20 volunteer catechists on staff for 150 students. There is also a youth club under the direction of one of the parishioners which meets Friday evenings in the parish hall and members of the group organize games on Saturdays for the children at the mission.

In the year 2000 the weekly mass at La Parisima was discontinued because of difficulties with the Landlord. In an effort to bring the people to the Parish center meetings of the various mission groups were scheduled at the parish hall. This present arrangement is beneficial to the various groups and puts the parish center at the heart of all parish activities.

A new parish council was founded and held its first meeting on February 15th, 2000 with 28 members. The council elected Eduardo Rivera as its president and developed a mission statement for the parish. It meets on the third Wednesday of every month and operates through committees. The council exercises a ministry of leadership in the parish and advises the pastor regarding the pastoral and spiritual life of the parish.

Several organizations are active in the parish: The St. Vincent de Paul Society, Respect for Life, Legion of Mary, Cenaculo de Maria, Christian Family Movement, Cursillos and the Friends of Jesus and Mary. The parish offers services in Spanish and English. On festive occasions services are bi-lingual. There are about 750 enrolled in the parish register and Sunday Mass attendance averages about 900.

In its location, the church is surrounded by Mercy Hospital, La Salle High School, Ermita De La Caridad, the Knights of Columbus with Dixie Highway cutting right through the center of the parish boundary. Situated as it is, the church lies on the south side of the highway and most people live on the north side. It is sometimes difficult for them to get here. Many people who live in the Brickell apartment area of the parish, are unaware of St. Kieran Parish and attend St. Jude Melkite Church.

The parish celebrated a thirty year anniversary on November 9, 1997 with a Solemn Mass and a festive dinner at the Rusty Pelican. Several of the former pastors attended along with old time parishioners who joined together with the newcomers as the parish recalled its journey through the years as a community of faith.

The name St. Kieran for the parish traces back to different sources. Officially Fr. Cassidy, the first pastor, claims that he named the new parish after the seminary from which he graduated in Ireland. Sister Kieran O'Keeffe who cared for Bishop Coleman Carroll at Mercy hospital when the parish was being founded claims that the Bishop told her the church would be named Kieran after her.

Both claims are valid. There is a stained glass window in the church commemorating St. Kieran, the monk and founder of the monastery of Clonmacnoise, one of the most celebrated of Ireland's holy places which became one of the great schools of Europe. Under his patronage the parish strives to be a center of worship, of learning and of evangelization.

Prepared from the parish archives by
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