

Tridentine Community News

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Tridentine Travelogue: St. John Cantius, Chicago

In 1988, Fr. Frank Phillips, CR, was sent on a mission no priest could love: Take over the historically Polish parish of St. John Cantius near downtown Chicago, and prepare it for closing. Its original Polish membership had largely passed away or moved away. Its buildings were run-down. The neighborhood was crime-ridden and very little housing was nearby. The construction of I-90 had bisected the area and driven homes and businesses away a generation earlier.

Who would have looked at this sorry situation and seen opportunity? The parish had nothing going for it. Just a run-down church and some unused buildings that had seen better days. But Fr. Phillips had an idea of creating a parish in the image of St. Louis' Holy Cross Church during the glory days of the pastorate of Msgr. Martin Hellriegel. Msgr. Hellriegel created one of North America's first "Liturgical Parishes," where parishioners were encouraged to learn the Divine Office and participate in the Latin Chants of the Church. Fr. Phillips thought that just maybe, he could attract people back to St. John Cantius if he made it a place where people could expect reverent liturgy, accompanied by great music.

One of his first experiments was adding a Latin Novus Ordo Mass. At that time, there were few, if any, other Latin Masses in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Shortly thereafter, Fr. Phillips obtained permission from then-Cardinal Bernardin to hold a Tridentine Mass, in accordance with Pope John Paul II's letter, *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*. Unlike most other parishes across North America who made similar requests, Fr. Phillips did not replace the Novus Ordo Latin Mass with the Tridentine Mass, but rather added the Tridentine to the schedule. Each Sunday now includes one Novus Ordo Latin Mass, one Tridentine Low Mass, one Tridentine High Mass, and one Novus Ordo English Mass.

The congregation kept growing, helping to fund Fr. Phillips' plan of making liturgical beauty a focus of the parish. He began a restoration of the church from its rather dingy state to sparkling original condition. New flooring was added, incorporating intricate designs.

The facility became more fully utilized: The school building was leased to the Chicago Academy of the Arts. The Chicago Brass Quintet moved in as Artists in Residence.

Fr. Phillips formed three separate choirs, so that each Sunday Mass could be accompanied by appropriately reverent music: One

choir specialized in Gregorian Chant; another in Viennese polyphony; and the third in Renaissance polyphony, an almost unthinkable accomplishment anywhere else in North America. A variety of Latin and Greek classes were introduced, to familiarize the congregation with the universal language of the Church.

St. John Cantius soon became a victim of its own success. Unlike most other dioceses, the Archdiocese of Chicago truly did grant a "wide and generous" permission for the Tridentine Mass to be celebrated. Much of the growth in recent years must be attributed to the work of Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Perry, an outspoken proponent of Latin in the liturgy. Today, there are eight weekly Tridentine indult Mass sites in the Archdiocese, some of which are located quite near to St. John Cantius. The Institute of Christ

the King's new church, the former St. Gelasius, for example, is located just a few miles away.

Despite the "competition," St. John Cantius continued to grow. In 1998, Fr. Phillips received the approval of Francis Cardinal George to create a new association of priests, the Society of St. John Cantius, chartered to work towards greater reverence and beauty in the liturgy. They will celebrate the Tridentine, Novus Ordo Latin, and Novus Ordo English Mass. There has even been discussion of additionally celebrating the Divine Liturgy as practiced by the Byzantine Catholic Church.

While growing slower than similar brethren like the Fraternity and the Institute, the Society of St. John Cantius already helps to run two parishes, one in Volo, Illinois, and one in Lawton, Michigan. 19 men now belong.

The well-known Red Missals in use at almost every Tridentine Mass location were born at St. John Cantius: Parishioner Mary Kraychy created them, and an organization to promote them, the Coalition in Support of Ecclesia Dei, from a starting point in the basement of the church.

Ironically, the neighborhood around St. John Cantius is now experiencing its own urban renaissance, becoming a trendy place to live. Parking, never easy to begin with, is more difficult than ever for those who attend the church. The parish even opened a café on the lower level of the church to cater to the changing demographics.

St. John Cantius has become the textbook case of how the Tridentine Mass can play a key role in revitalizing a parish and saving an architecturally important building. Find out more about this landmark church at www.cantius.org

