



THE CHAPEL OF THE INCARNATE WORD

The chapel derives its long history from three French Sisters who came to Texas from Lyons, France, in 1869, answering a call from Bishop Claude Marie Dubuis to assist in the care of the sick in San Antonio. The Sisters brought the rich heritage of Incarnational spirituality, which they received during their brief training at the Monastery of the Incarnate Word in Lyons, which had been founded by Venerable Jeanne de Matel in the 17^{th} century.

Groundbreaking: January 6, 1906 on the Solemnity of the Epiphany. **Dedication:** May 30, 1907 on Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

In collaboration with Rev. Mother Madeleine Chollet, Rev. J.G. Benarek of the Diocese of Chicago supervised the planning and design. The project was undertaken by architect F.B. Gaenslen and contractor August A. Guessel. Fr. Benarek died six months after the ground-breaking and Mother Madeleine Chollet died July 19, 1906.

Dimensions: 564 feet long, exclusive of the apse/sanctuary, 68 feet wide. Built of red brick, with white stone facings and slate roof. For many years, the bell tower was the highest structure in San Antonio.

A broad stone stairway leads to the stone and granite entrance which opens onto the vestibule. The baptismal font is a reminder of our initiation into the Church in baptism. The inscription on the baptismal font reads: "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." From the vestibule, three oak doors open into the Chapel. Over the wider center door is the Latin inscription, which translates "The Master is here and calls you." Over the side doors are the inscriptions "Come, let us adore" and "Come all to Me."

In the floor inside the center door, the Congregational Seal of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word is embedded in Italian red marble. The crown of thorns, pierced heart, cross and nails are all symbols associated with the crucifixion of Jesus, the Incarnate Word. The monogram of the name of Jesus, IHS, recalls Jesus' presence in the hearts of those who extend his presence to others in the world. The words "Amor Meus" (My Love) refer to the divine love for humanity and our love of God.

Fourteen bas-relief Stations of the Cross along the north and south walls of the nave provide life-like images which retrace the stages of Jesus' journey to Calvary. Each station is five feet in height.

Seating Capacity: About 300 in the stalls in the nave and another 200 in the side aisles. The stalls, carved in golden oak, are arranged in the monastic style, which provides

individual seating and facilitates the chanting of the psalms in alternating choirs. The top of each choir stall in the upper rows is crowned with a cross and adorned with fleur-de-lis, the national symbol of France and the birthplace of the Congregation. The original kneelers were boxes under the seats, used to store prayer books. The seats may be raised to allow people to kneel for some parts of the Mass and other services.

Style: The Romanesque interior is marked by rounded arches, columns with gilded Corinthians capitals with a semicircular apse and dome. Above the apsidal arch is a representation of the Congregational seal with the two angels holding a ribbon which reads "Laudetur Verbum Incarnatum" which means "Praised be the Incarnate Word."

The altar is of white and rose Italian Carrara marble. The marble statues in the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph were originally on two side altars. The Latin inscription on the ribbon surrounding the altar translates: "O Ineffable Sacrament of Admirable Love. This is the Bread of Life. This is the Food of the Soul."

The icon of the Annunciation directly behind the altar reflects the Congregation's central mystery of the Incarnation. Four smaller images show the Founder and Foundresses of the Congregation and illustrate the past, present, and future life of the Congregation.

A Eucharistic Chapel was created in the 2006 renovation. The flowers in the window in the Eucharistic Chapel represent the countries of our first Sisters and of our current ministries, surrounding an image of sacred nourishment for the human family: France/iris, Texas foundation and USA/bluebonnet, Mexico/cactus, Ireland/shamrock, Peru/kantuta, Guatemala/orchid, Zambia/flame lily.

The original chapel design incorporated many small light bulbs (modern technology of the day) which lined the insides of the two great arches, the ribs of the semi-circular dome, and the side altars. Rings of lights encircled each of the columns. A pulpit was attached to the first column on the left. Two small wooden altars in the side apses were removed during the 1992 renovation to provide for fire exits from the sanctuary area.

The suspended crucifix showing the resurrected Christ was commissioned by the Sisters for the Chapel at the time of the 2006-2007 renovation. A crown of thorns encircles the globe to symbolize that suffering takes place on earth but is transformed in the resurrected Christ.

The fourteen large stained-glass windows portray the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The designs follow the German tradition of showing clothing, furniture and building styles from the Middle Ages. The high, smaller round windows display various symbols related to the main image in each window. A choir of angels with the musical instruments fills the windows above the altar.

The first organ was installed in 1906. The next instrument, a three-manual pipe organ, originally by Scheulke, was enlarged and rebuilt in 1946. It consisted of 1,1992 pipes in 17 ranks with 42 stops.

A new Schoenstein pipe organ (Opus 159) was installed in early 2010 and blessed on October 3, 2010 by San Antonio Auxiliary Bishop Oscar Cantu. This electric-pneumatic action instrument has 24 voices in 27 ranks in the gallery organ, which is linked to the one-manual console organ in the sanctuary.

External features: Four trumpeting angels, each twelve feet tall, grace the four corners of the base of the steeple which surmounts the tower at the main entrance. The tower bell was cast in Belgium. The inscriptions dedicate it to God's service and name it "John, Claude, Anthony, Pierre, Ignatius, Madeleine," honoring Bishops Forrest and Dubuis, the city's patron St. Anthony, and Sisters Pierre, Ignatius (Rev. Mother at the time) and Madeleine. Four bas-relief symbols of the Evangelists (man, lion, ox, and eagle) adorn the exterior wall of the apse.

Renovations: In 1969 the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word of San Antonio, the chapel underwent repairs and alterations to meet the liturgical directives of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The principal change moved the high altar forward so that the priest could face the assembly. The marble altar rail, which had divided the sanctuary from the nave, was removed. Four statues of founders of religious orders of men (Benedict, Francis, Dominic and Ignatius) were removed from niches behind the high altar. Air conditioning units were installed.

In 1985, the Chapel was closed for major structural repair, for which a preservation Campaign was organized. The Chapel was solemnly reopened on October 21, 1992, the anniversary of the occupation of the first house by the three founding sisters in 1869.

The 2006-2007 renovations, marking the Chapel's 100th year, included a new altar, marble floor, redesign of the sanctuary, new seating in the original style, repainting, new lighting, sound and video systems, and upgraded air-conditioning. The work was directed by liturgical designer Rolf Rohn, general contractor M.J. Boyle, woodwork stalls by Bethany Company in PA, and Circle C. The apsidal carvings were executed in Italy of German linden wood by Edmund Rabasner from designs created by Renate Rohn.

Prepared by Sr. Eilish Ryan, CCVI, 2004; updated 2007, 2011

