

# Sacred Heart Church celebrates Our Lady of Guadalupe

For the past four years, the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been Sacred Heart parish's largest celebration. Beginning in October an evangelization team began a 50-night series of rosaries throughout areas where parishioners live. They had especially large participation. Some nights more than 200 participated in rural areas where there is no access to Mass in Spanish and many work in dairies and horse farms.

## **Antorcha Guadalupana/ Guadalupe Torch**

On Nov. 30 the "Antorcha Guadalupana" arrived in the parish on its way from Mexico City to New York. The purpose of this run is to raise consciousness for issues of immigration and immigrants' rights. Almost 400 people attended the week-night event (receiving of torch, Mass, and dinner) despite cold and rain.

## **Guadalupe Novena**

On Dec. 3, the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, the Guadalupe novena began in the parish. Each night a different parish organization or group of families sponsored the events of the evening which began with a rosary and closed with a dinner served to all who attended. For example, one night the youth group sponsored the event; another immigrants from the town of Zapotlán Palma in the state of Oaxaca organized the celebration; on yet



another night, the small English speaking community of the parish hosted the evening. The homilies during the Masses formed a nine-day Ignatian reflection/retreat.

## **The Feast Day**

For very large Masses the parish gathers at nearby Sacred Heart Cathedral since the congregation has outgrown its current worship space. On Dec. 11 at 9 pm an evening of honoring the Virgin began.

Music, reflections and traditional religious dance interspersed the recitation of a final rosary. Actors dramatized the events of the apparition and at midnight a Mass began, concelebrated with Fr. Bob Wiesenbaugh, Fr. Shay Auerbach, and Fr. Wayne Ball of the diocese of Richmond who is pastor of a neighboring parish with a Hispanic community.

After Mass, the parish church remained open through the night for prayer. The normal Sunday Mass schedule was observed with cultural celebrations held all day at the Sacred Heart Center. The youth folkloric dance troupe danced as did the traditional dancers. Choirs sang and following the final evening Mass, a dance was held at which three bands played.

A number of parishioners are from the town of Degollado in the Mexican state of Jalisco. The feast day of Degollado is December 12. For that reason a letter from the pastor of the town was requested for "los hijos ausentes en Richmond" (the absent chil-



dren residing in Richmond). The pastor of Degollado obliged and his touching letter was read at all Masses.

Many of the owners of Mexican restaurants in the Richmond area are originally from Degollado. As a way to recognize them, their community, and their contributions to the Richmond hispanic community they were asked to provide the food for the event on Sunday. Eighteen restaurants eagerly donated all the food for the celebration.

All told over 2000 people participated during the final 24 hours of the celebration beginning Saturday night and lasting through Sunday night.

**Brief Parish Profile**

The Province took on pastoral responsibility of the parish in 1990 when efforts were begun to open Sacred Heart Center across the street from the church. At that time the parish had a few hundred members. The parish has grown to over 1000 families and is now more than 90% Hispanic, mostly recent immigrants from Mexico and significant numbers from Central America as well.

To adjust to the demographic shift, the parish began a master plan project which reached an important step at the beginning of November with the writing of direction statement for the parish. Fr. William Rickle, SJ, assisted the Master Plan Committee over two days of meetings, prayer, and reflection. Town hall meetings were held last year facilitated by. Ronaldo Cruz, former Director of the Secretariat for Hispanics of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Subsequent to those meetings,



Mr. Cruz drew up reports of the town halls which were instrumental in the direction statement drawn up at the beginning of November. Below is the introductory paragraph of the direction statement:

**The Living Spirit of the Sacred Heart Community**

We are a Catholic parish where people can find a home, warmth, welcome, acceptance and healing. Our community would like to reflect more the mystery of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to all. We will be a community of learners—we will learn from each other and commit ourselves to spiritual formation and acquiring and sharing skills for life. The parish holds a special place in the diocese for evangelization of and pastoral outreach to Spanish speakers and serves as a resource for ministry with them, while at the same time welcomes all who wish to call Sacred Heart their home.

The first sentence refers to people’s experience of finding welcome, especially immigrants who feel accepted culturally. Many have brought with them very difficult experiences of poverty and in some cases the trauma of violence and civil war. They speak, along with many long time members of the parish of the healing they have found here at Sacred Heart. The third sentence, referring to life skills reflects the parish’s commitment to the Sacred Heart Center. This includes parish support of programming including providing volunteers,

and also promotion of such programming among parishioners who need such life skills. Spiritual formation is spelled out later in the document as specifically through Ignatian Spirituality.

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