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Homily on the first anniversary in our new church

Our parish is a miracle. Literally. Miracle comes from the Latin word for wonder. And the history of this parish is a wonder. Parishes are founded by bishops, but this parish did not start in a diocesan office building. The last of the founding mothers of the church died in the past few years, Ramona Salvatore, Judy Pardun, Tina and Terry were still here forty years later. Madre, Carl, Char, Tim and Grace have been around for a couple dozen at least.

It was in the mid-seventies, some forty odd years ago, that a handful of local Charismatic Catholics and Evangelicals living out here came together and ran a fund drive in the community for a Christian Community Center. The Salvatores and the Parduns were among this small group. The building was to be a community center during the week and a church on Sunday. Ten years later the evangelicals under Bob Silver were able to build their own church next door. After Larry Salvatore died there was a legal fight over who owned the building, the community or the church. Like any good compromise, neither side was happy with the result but both sides could live with it and move on. A community board would own the building but the Catholics could continue using it on Sunday in exchange for covering half the building's expenses – which by the time I showed up in the late nineties - cost under \$200 a month. The community center board felt they were being robbed by such a low rent, the Catholics felt they had been robbed of their building. But we still had a place of worship and they had a revenue stream that helped to keep them afloat.

Twenty years ago, having just returned from doctoral studies to teach philosophy at Gonzaga, the diocese asked me if I could take the Sunday masses out here for the month of July. It was explained to me that you were a mission church of Assumption parish, but when they had been reduced to one priest they no longer had anyone to come out to say Mass on Sunday. Another Jesuit associated with the charismatic movement, Armand Nigro, was able to supply priests from Malawi who were studying at Gonzaga, but that supply chain had just dried up.

So out I came. What I discovered was a wonder; a group of 40-50 people who sang and worshipped louder than a church of several hundreds. And they ended the Mass with a prayer to God to send them a priest. Judy Pardun approached me after mass. Could I come on a regular basis? Could I be their priest? I like to think it was the power of my homily, but I suspect she had been asking every priest who ever come to say Mass.

In any case I jumped at the chance. It meant preaching every week, but I love preaching, and it would mean being part of a community rather than moving around every few weeks, and it would mean not having another priest telling me what I can and cannot do. So I called the diocese which was very happy to have its staffing problem solved.

As I said when we started, we were around 40-50 people, maybe 20 or so families. But with a stable priest our numbers began to rise. I remember early parish council meeting where on a good month we might have \$400 to spend. Once the building expenses and Mass supplies were paid that left precious little. But every month we would also have a building collection, and five years later we had \$40,000, enough to buy a few acres of undeveloped land on which to build our future church. By then we had grown to about 60 families. We went to then Bishop Skylstad to get his permission. He replied that the some day the diocese was going to have to build a parish in Suncrest anyway, but he did not want us to buy too little land that would not let us grow. So he proposed that the diocese pay for a large chunk of land that we could pay back when we had the money. He also proposed that we be the nucleus of a new parish.

There was some concern among the diocesan priests about the name. Our Lady of the Lake, what kind of a name was that? Was it not the Lady of the Lake who gave King Arthur his sword Excalibur? We were founded by charismatics so how about naming it the Holy Spirit parish? We said that would be fine, but if he wanted to know what we wanted for a name, we wanted it to be Our Lady of the Lake. I did a search on this new internet search engine, Google. I found 20 Catholic parishes named Our Lady of the Lake and two Catholic Universities—one in San Antonio (that one of Buster's sons later attended) and this school in Indiana, who used the name in French: Notre Dame du Lac, Notre Dame for short.

Then last year another miracle when we finally built our church. We knew we would never raise enough money to build it. But a few years ago Gary put his foot down. It's now or never. And so we got to work. People dug deep. People worked even harder. And together we helped God to get it done. Raising the money was unrealistic. The diocese did not want us to build to small. Once we had a church we would be sure to grow. We would have to raise enough money to convince a bank to give us a mortgage to build a church twice our size. We raised half a million in cash, and another half million in pledges. Through the help of a local banker, Dan Byrne, referred from the diocese and a member of the Knight of Columbus I might add, we secured a half -million dollar mortgage. From its own experience the diocese advised us that we could expect at most 10% of the cost to come from in-kind volunteer work. Gene estimates we got up to 40% covered through sweat equity and Gene's calling in favors from 40 others in construction.

In the real world this church could not have been built. The diocesan building committee did not think it could be done, but in the end they could not say no. The bishop originally told us to ask Parishes to loan us the money. Only one met with us and they just looked at us funny. The bank who Dan did cajole to loan us the money was soon bought out by a bigger bank which made it clear that although they would have never loaned us the money themselves but they were stuck with us. And then parishioners contributed thousands of man hours and woman hours, staining, sanding, polishing, roofing, painting, wiring, securing in kind donations of kitchen equipment, wood, even concrete.

In the real world this could not happen. But we live in God's world. And in God's world anything is possible. God's world actually is the real world, but most people can't see it

or won't believe it when push comes to shove. But as Gene George would say to us, to the bankers, to the diocesan building committee, and to anyone else who would listen: "The Lord will provide. We need only have faith and lean in."

We did, God did. And here we are. Alleluia!