

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 44

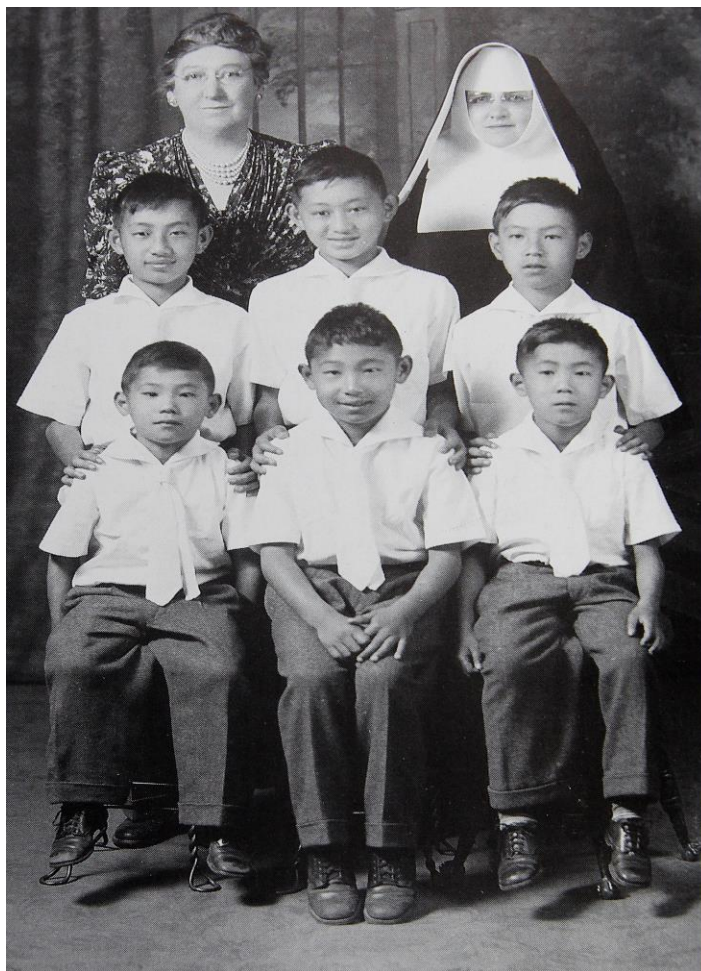
ST STEPHEN'S: Hard to Top

By Monsignor Raymond Renwald, printed in the November 11, 1976 issue of the *Catholic Herald*

This is a continuation of the article from last week by Monsignor Renwald about St. Stephen's story.

PHASE III: The Japanese Mission

This activity was begun at St. Stephen's and became an independent project years later. On November 13, 1914, Father Breton, a missionary who had spent many years in Japan and had recently come to Los Angeles, visited the Sisters at St. Stephen's. He had learned that an estimated 8,000 Japanese lived in Sacramento, mostly in the area close to St. Stephen's. He wanted the Sisters to take on a missionary project directed to the Japanese.



Diocesan Archives

Children at the Japanese Mission in Sacramento Circa 1916

In June 1915, Sister Angela, a Japanese nun came to the mission with the Sisters. She rekindled the thought of a Japanese mission. By 1916 seven Japanese children had enrolled in St. Stephen's school. In June 1917, Fr. Breton returned and took two sisters from St. Stephen's with him to assist at the baptism of a Japanese woman. He returned later that same year, bringing with him Sister Julia who was Japanese. He urged the Sisters to start an infant asylum. At that time, however, St. Stephen's was so full that it was not possible to do this.

However, the idea never died among the Sisters. Contacts with the Japanese were kept up through pupils in the school and, later, the regular care of Japanese children in Grace Day Home. Finally when Bishop Armstrong came and was told of these dreams of the Sisters, he ordered the opening of a Japanese Mission on September 30, 1929. A small kindergarten followed; later sewing classes for older girls and adults as well. This was a pioneering effort at improving race relations when restrictions were taken for granted. Holy Family Japanese Mission closed during World War II when the Japanese were forced to leave Sacramento in 1943.

PHASE IV: The Slavonian Church

In 1922, Father Biskupovich visited his sister in Sacramento. He was welcomed by many other former residents of the same delightful Dalmatian Island in the Adriatic Sea. They were happy to learn of the possibility of having sermons and songs and services in their own language. Earlier the Italians and Portuguese had asked for and received priests of their own nationality. The Bishop readily granted the same permission to the Slavonian people and the use of St. Stephen's Church. From 1922 to 1926 Fr. Biskupovich conducted services there. The Masses were well attended and the singing was so good that the old timers still talk about it today.

In 1926, Father Biskupovich returned to his native country and was replaced by Father Cipic. By now the people wanted to build a new church and began collecting for it. However, Father Cipic returned to Yugoslavia before this came to pass. But the dream did not fade away. It resulted in St. Philip the Apostle Church for Slavs of the Byzantine Rite many years later. Most recently the Croatian people established a language school at St. Philomene's parish and have purchased property for a religious and cultural center.

PHASE V: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church

Frederico Falcon, the Mexican social worker employed by the Catholic Welfare Bureau during the thirties to the fifties, frequently spoke of the desire of the Mexican people for their own church. When St. Stephen's Church building reverted to the diocese after the departure of the Japanese, the opportunity presented itself. The bishop acceded to the idea and a committee was formed to collect funds to repair old St. Stephen's. Susano Garcia, the father of Judge Edward Garcia of Sacramento, was the head of this committee. The Church was opened in the fall of 1949.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Father Carl Willman was the first administrator. He was followed by Father Anthony Maio, who listened to the request of the people and built for them the present Guadalupe Church at 711 T Street which was opened in November 1959. Once again the humble St. Stephen's had inspired zealous apostles to launch new projects.

PHASE VI: The Filipino Center

The Filipinos had asked to have a convent of Filipino Sisters established in Sacramento. In 1949 this seemed like too big an undertaking; but in 1959, with the prospect of St. Stephen's becoming vacant, it seemed possible.

Bishop McGucken accepted the Sisters and on June 19, 1959, Mother Catalina and Mother Rosario arrived. They were to prepare for four permanent Sisters, due in a few months. Mrs. Calica, Valdez and Estoista were among the group of Filipino women who prepared the old church and school for another apostolate. It served as a convent for the Sisters and a Filipino Center until 1962 when the present site at 1123 W Street was acquired. This still serves as the center of the Filipino apostolate.

PHASE VII: The Cursillo Center

On March 8, 1962, Cursillo No. 1 was held in Sacramento in St Stephen's Hall at 7th and T. Father Eugene Lucas and Father Keith Kenny were the directors. Such zeal was generated that Father Lucas set up an office in the Cathedral and began training leaders. When Old St. Stephen's on 3rd and O became vacant, he moved his headquarters to it and staged over 50 cursillos. The very poverty of the structure seemed to fuel the zeal of the participants and the poor surroundings were reminders of the humble accommodations of Bethlehem.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

St Stephen's Hall, Seventh and T Streets

PHASE VIII: Single Men's Center

The winter of 1966-67 was a hard one for migrant workers. Abel Chacón, a Mexican from Los Angeles who had followed the crops up and down California for years and knew the plight of single men in the winter, formed an Association of Single Men.

Father Keith Kenny, the pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, saw yet another Church-inspired use for the building at 3rd and O. He turned it over to the Association as a hostel for single unemployed men. These did all the work, including the cooking of their meals. Rows of cots were placed where church pews and school desks had been.

Over one hundred men found food and shelter in old St. Stephen's that winter. The next summer the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency claimed the property and the building was razed. St Stephen's Church and School finally went to its rest but not before it had sent seven of its children, we might say, out into the world to carry on its work. Its name still survives in the Parish Hall of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. St Stephen's was said to have been the carriage house to the Crocker's before it became a church and school. The people used to say that it had been their stables. Maybe that part of the legend should not be disturbed. Jesus was once again born into a stable when Mass was celebrated in St Stephen's. He sanctified that stable as well

as the poor who came to Him there, and inspired them to go out and start seven other apostolates.

The people, not the building, are the church, we are so often reminded. That is true, of course; but the building gives unity to the people, which they could hardly attain without it. Because this building repeated its function many times over, it is typical of other parish centers in the diocese which did similar things although we doubt that there is another which can “top” this story



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Interior of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church