

History of the Saint Joseph Latin Mass Society

Chronicled by:

Joan Pearsall

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Before getting into the history of the reintroduction of the Latin Mass in Austin, Texas, I'm giving some of my personal background as this did lead up to it.

The Catholic Church first captured my heart and soul when I was a very small child living in the slums of East London.

We moved to Limehouse from another part of London when I was about 4 1/2 years old, to just a couple of streets away from my Aunt Lou and family. Aunt Lou, a widow before I was born, had married an Irishman and had nine children. She also took in three orphaned cousins, so had 12 living with her in a tiny, two-bedroom house with no indoor plumbing. They were very poor, but always cheerful and lively, with lots of singing and dancing. They were very proud to be Irish, but spoke pure Cockney and were very loyal to the Crown.

Also they were very Catholic. I do not remember their being pious or prayerful but knew the church was part of their very being, in a way that other churches weren't. There was a lovely little Madonna in their tiny parlor and a picture of the Sacred Heart that I puzzled about. There was a Catholic wedding every year with lots of singing and beer drinking. And the processions... how I loved them and wondered why I could not be in them!

Very young, I had the feel of being Catholic and knew one day I would be one. Much later, more meaning would be revealed. My sister and I had to go to the nearby Church of England church and Sunday school, although our parents did not attend. Because it is an established church, the state schools started with prayers and there were scripture studies. In those days, people of the lower social classes always stopped going to church after leaving school, except for "christenings" (baptisms), weddings and funerals. Nowadays, even the children don't go and the old ceremonies are usually bypassed.

We moved to Sideup, just across the border of Kent, when I was nearly 11 years old. The church there was "low" and I refuse to be confirmed.

My destiny to be Catholic, however, was not fulfilled until I was 52! World War II intervened, then I emigrated to Canada, then to the United States, after marrying an American. I did not want to go to church at all, but when my first baby was born I knew he had to be christened. The church in upstate New York was a "high" Episcopal one, more traditional than in England. My other two children also were baptized Episcopal, the youngest in Texas. It is ironic that the older son, who caused me to go back to church, is an atheist!

Anglican churches always have good choirs and I sang in them and yet I always knew it was not enough to be Anglican.

After Vatican II it seemed that everything Catholic that had been imprinted on me was changing: Latin, devotions, statues, were being swept away.

But in the 1970s, I got to know the "Pink Sisters." Their cloistered convent was only 10 minutes' walk away from my home in Austin, Texas. I felt compelled to go there more and more, not realizing for quite a while that the "pull" was the Blessed Sacrament, always exposed and adored there.

At last, I knew there could be no ambiguity, as with Anglicans, and the "real thing" was to be found in the Catholic Church.

In 1975, I was received into it, in the Sisters' Chapel. But it was a time of wilderness – no music, beautiful liturgy, or devotions. Except for the Legion of Mary, which I promptly joined.

Also, I subscribed to a number of Catholic papers and magazines, and so learned in 1984 of the possible partial Indult for the Old Latin Mass. There was supposed to be a survey to find out if there would be interest in it. That did not happen, so I took it into my own hands to get up a petition. It was a bit brash, perhaps, since I was a relative newcomer, but it meant a lot to me, even though the proposed Indult was very restrictive and would not include me. It was meant just for those brought up in the Old Mass, not for converts or children.

I managed to get about 40 signatures. A few were eager, many lukewarm. They had become used to the New Mass, etc. I emphasized that this was The Mass for hundreds of years, our heritage, and that people have died for it.

Soon after the petition was sent to the Chancery, I received a phone call saying the bishop would like to talk to me. This was Bishop Vincent Harris. He was extremely kind and courteous and we had a good discussion. With no call-back, I assumed the petition had been discarded. Apparently it had been kept on file. In 1988 it was announced that Pope John Paul II was allowing a new, much wider Indult, for all who wished, if their bishops agreed, but would only be in certain designated places, not in a church. It seemed this was motivated by Archbishop Marcel Lefevre's initiative in consecrating four new bishops for the Old Latin Rite.

I was asked if the people on my list still would want to attend. Some had died or moved away but I did indeed know of others who would be thankful to attend. Bishop John McCarthy, who did not himself care for it, was one of the American bishops who did allow the Old Mass. Ours was to be in the small Brothers' Chapel at Saint Edward's University, with Fr. Leon Boarman, C.S.C. as celebrant.

It was a very small group, about 30 to 35 people, and only Joe Ryan and myself were the "choir." Sometimes one or two others joined us. Jon Whitney was one, when he could take time from his one-man business. We could only practice about 10 minutes before the Mass at 12:30 PM and just sang the easy Missa de Angeles chants.

Joe Ryan died suddenly at only about 40 years old. Jon Whitney did a fine job of taking over the "choir" in his memory.

Fr. Boarman, in his 90's, had to return to the Holy Cross mother house because of failing health. Immediately, we were asked to leave the Brothers' Chapel.

The next location was the Maronite Church on 51st Street. They only had a general purpose meeting hall then and we were welcomed, with Fr. Robert Ignatius Bradley, S.J. named by Bishop McCarthy to be the celebrant. Fr. Bradley was a wonderful Jesuit of the old school, very

articulate, intellectual and devoted to the Faith, a real spiritual leader. Attendance started to build up. Then the Marionites built a beautiful new church, also open to us, but the rent was increased beyond our budget.

So there was another move, this time to the Mausoleum Chapel at Assumption Cemetery. It was not an ideal arrangement but we made the best of it.

Other locations were considered. A place in an actual church opened up: Saint Ignatius Church on Oltorf. People started to flock to our Mass there, in a central location and at a convenient time, 1:30 PM Sundays. The choir grew. After about four years, there was a new pastor who did not want the Latin Mass. Sacred Heart Church cordially invited us to have Mass at a later time in the afternoon. For several years, that was a very welcoming home. More people came. Many of them were parishioners of Saint Mary Cathedral, who came after attending Mass there.

In 2007 then – Cathedral Rector, Fr. Bud Roland, and Bishop Gregory Aymond (who had not been a Latin supporter), came to an arrangement for the Latin Mass to be celebrated at the Cathedral on Sundays at 3:30 p.m. There were some mixed reactions, but some remembered that in the early days it had seemed an unlikely dream for this Mass to be heard at the Cathedral itself.

This move preceded, by a few months, Pope Benedict XVI's Motu Proprio known as Summorum Pontificum, declaring that the Old Mass never had been abrogated and any priest could now celebrate the Mass without his bishop's permission.

Attendance had dropped after each move but at the Cathedral it has grown steadily, with many young families and some with numerous children. Several dedicated lay volunteers give hours of their time to help with the liturgy, administration, budget and hospitality. There now is an excellent choir led by Barbara Manson and a children's choir led by outstanding organist Dr. Brooks Whitmore.

Two vocations to the priesthood have arisen from this community, which with their families, they were part of since boyhood: Fr. Michael Stinson, FSSP and Fr. Caleb Kick, FSSP, both former altar servers. Other vocations from our group include Fr. Todd Anderson, SSPX, Fr. Michael

Malain, FSSP, Fr. Charles Vreeland, and Deacon Stephen Braun, FSSP.

Our beloved Fr. Bradley had to retire in 2011, due to ill health. Fr. Albert Laforet, Jr., Rector of the Cathedral at that time became the devoted celebrant.

In 2016, Fr. Tim Nolt was assigned as the Cathedral Rector and Fr. Hai Nguyen, Parochial Vicar. They both learned to celebrate the low and high Mass for which we are very grateful.

This chronicler, now almost 95, cannot be as active as before but is humbly thankful to have had some part in the formation of what has come to be known as the Saint Joseph Latin Mass Society.