

James Hyatt McGee built the first church in Kansas City in the 1830's. It was a log cabin, and it stood where 11th and Pennsylvania Streets meet today in downtown Kansas City. A visiting Jesuit named the cabin for a French Jesuit who longed to bring the gospel to the new world--St. John Francis Regis.

In 1845 Bernard Donnelly was ordained a priest. His first assignment was pastor of St. Mary's in Independence. The parish boundaries ran along the Missouri River from the Kaw to Lexington, and south to the Arkansas border. Donnelly thought St. Regis was too small to live in, so he stayed in more spacious quarters in Independence. The first person to live in the first St. Regis rectory was a woman, Margaret Gre. She was an Iroquois and she cleaned the church. An unsolved mystery from pioneer days is how a building that was too small for the pastor was large enough for Margaret--and her six children.

In 1856 Donnelly replaced the log cabin with a larger church, and in 1876 they changed its name from St. Regis to Immaculate Conception. Later it was torn down, and in 1886 a third church was completed on that site, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, which stands there to this day.

25 years ago, in 1964, the Catholics in southeast Kansas City were given a new parish. It was named not just after a saint, but in memory of the Catholic families who pioneered our city. In 1964 Jack Ruby was sentenced to death; Martin Luther King won the Nobel Peace Prize; Khrushchev was replaced by Kosygin and Brezhnev; Herbert Hoover died; Douglas MacArthur died; Pope Paul VI visited the Holy Land; *Mary Poppins* and *My Fair Lady* opened at movie theatres; Cassius Clay beat Sonny Liston; the New York World's Fair opened; the Watusi, the Monkey, and the Funky Chicken could be danced in discotheques across the country; and St. Regis parish, the new St. Regis, was born.

In 25 years we've had pastors who became bishops, and children who now rest in the arms of God. Our families and friends have moved in and moved out. We loved Stella, and she left us; we loved Fr. Reardon; he's doing better, but I'm sure his greatest pain today is being so far away from the people here he loves.

We've had many blessings, but we cannot rest from our labors. Our neighborhood is home to many wonderful people, but it is also home to racism, drug houses, and murder. St. Regis Church must remain a tower of hope for this neighborhood. We will give life its meaning. We who have suffered sadness, we who have rejoiced, we who believe in eternal life--we will give life its meaning.

Imagine you were present for the episode in today's Gospel, and looked on the dead child of the widow of Naim. If you had human eyes, you'd have said, "Isn't that sad? This child is dead." But if you looked, as Jesus did, with the eyes of faith, you'd say, "This is all right. This child died so that it might live again." My brothers and sisters, Christ has called us to be the eyes of faith for this neighborhood, to say, "This is all right. We have life and we have death, but we will live again; life will win."

I'm holding in my hand a chip of wood from our diocesan archives. We have reason to believe that this splinter is all that remains of the original St. Regis log cabin church. If you look at this wood with the eyes of a historian you will say, "Isn't that sad? That church is dead." If you look with the eyes of faith, you will say, "This is all right. That church is dead so that this church might live."