



OLPH ~ PAST AND PRESENT

John V. Cinchett in his just released small book Images of America: Historic Tampa Churches tells the narrative of the historic churches and temples of Tampa "lovingly cared for by their devoted congregations." The author presents historical pictures of the churches and dedicates four pages (out of 128) to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Ybor City, writing:

"Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church is an Ybor City historic landmark....This church has a rich history in ministering to the many diverse cultures. The original church, Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church, was dedicated on April 19, 1891. The Jesuits guided the parish...for Spanish-speaking immigrants...until 1926, when Italian-speaking priests of the Salesian Order took over stewardship of the parish."

"In 1934, the Redemptorist Fathers accepted care of the parish and moved forward with plans for a larger church dedicated on July 15, 1937 as Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in honor of the special devotion of the Redemptorists to Mary....In 1986, the Marist Fathers accepted care of the church."

"The Sisters of St. Joseph established St. Joseph Academy at the church on September 23, 1891. In 1937...the school was renamed Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH) Academy....For generations, the school children were often a reflection of the vibrant immigrant cultures the church and the academy served in Ybor City."

In 1944 the Sisters of St. Joseph transferred care of the school to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who served the school until 1975, when the school closed due to a change in the demographics of the neighborhood, which continues to be a factor up to this day; as a result, almost all of our parishioners come from outside the parish boundaries.

There is a minority "White- American" component of the congregation (mostly of Italian descent) who are very generous. We have a big Filipino community, coming from all over the City of Tampa, who are attracted to the title of Our Lady of Perpetual Help which is very strong in the Philippines and are very supportive of the Parish. They form a beautiful Choir for our English 10 a.m. Mass. They take care of a Food Kitchen we have every Thursday for the homeless (around forty). And finally, a growing Latino sector; but don't be misled, this is not a homogeneous sector. It is formed by many nationalities: Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and Central and South Americans. We are talking of at least four different cultures, religiosities, ways.



Author & Pastor Héctor Cruz SM

We are looking, more and more, at a "Latino-Americanizing" of our Parish Community. The numbers attending Mass every Sunday show this phenomenon; as well as the numbers of Baptisms, First Communions and Confirmations. This transition has not been exempted from problems of adjustment. But, nevertheless, I think that, under the Marist administration, we have been following the very same path of the founding Jesuits: serving at the best of our efforts, to a multi-cultural community of faith.