

# *History of St. Bernadette Catholic Church*



*Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina  
September 2017*

## *Message from Our Pastor*

This year we celebrate our thirtieth anniversary as a parish community, and we celebrate with faith, because God has accompanied us in the midst of poverty and the smallness of our community, and has helped us to grow through the talents and generosity of many people.

We give thanks for so many people who have gathered with us around the altar to celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist. This is what has joined us over the years; what has helped our children grow up into young men and women; what has helped form our parishioners as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ; what has allowed us to reach out in works of charity and generosity to those in need; and what has continued to remind us that, even when people move on to other places, they continue to carry their experiences as part of the community of Saint Bernadette Parish. The Eucharist is what unites us with those other members of our parish who have departed for eternity, and as a community we entrust them to the Mercy of God and hope to share in the Heavenly Banquet with them some day.

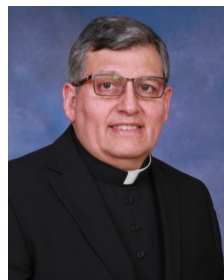
We now look forward into the next chapter of our history, recognizing the call to help our community continue to grow, not only for the almost 3000 families already registered in our parish, but also for the Church in southwestern Wake County. This beautiful work will build on the gifts and generosity already present in our community, and we pledge to nourish this “communion” every time we gather for the Holy Eucharist.

May Mary our Mother intercede for us, so that we can grow closer every day to her beloved Son and receive from Him all the blessings we need for our community of Saint Bernadette, just as we have for the past 30 years.

In Christ,

*Father Fernando Torres*

Pastor



## **Introduction**

The history of the Catholic faith and St. Bernadette Catholic Church in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina, is a very interesting and complex journey.

Many thanks to the past and present clergy, parish staff and parishioners who have shared their experiences to tell the story of our parish fully and accurately.

This parish history was constructed by reviewing history documents created by parish historians, then adding additional information from interviews with parishioners and clergy.

Our history narrative is organized in four segments:

- **The Early Years.....**Covers a long period of time through 1986, or defined as “Pre-1987.” It includes the initial Catholic activities in the area prior to our start as a mission church and then as a parish.
- **Growing Our Dream.....**Describes start-up activities, challenges and mission church activities during the period 1987 through 1990.
- **The Growing Years.....**Includes parish activities from 1990 through 2016.
- **The Journey Continues.....**Covers our current year activities and looks forward to the future.

## **The Early Years**

Father Thomas Price purchased land in Holly Springs, North Carolina, for the small Church of St. Mary in the early 1900s. Mass was said once a month by Father George Woods, who traveled from the Nazareth orphanage in Raleigh by horse and buggy. The family of Sebastian Scholl, father of our own Myrtle Hopson, maintained the church building, painting it each time their home was painted. Flowers for the altar and ground plantings were furnished by the Coudon family.

In the aftermath of World War I most of the Catholic families moved away in search of better jobs. Eventually, membership declined to such a small number that the parish was disbanded and the building sold. Dr. Cozart of Fuquay Springs purchased the parish property and had the church torn down to use the material in the home he was building on Fuquay Avenue in Fuquay.

Mass wasn't offered in the Fuquay-Varina area again until 1963 when it was offered for a brief time at the Raleigh Savings and Loan Building.

Catholics in the area had to attend Mass at either Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh or another area parish. That meant a lot of travel and didn't provide a sense of community that a local parish could.

In 1967 St. Mary Mother of the Church Parish in Garner was established and its territory included Fuquay-Varina, so Catholics from our area began attending Mass there and did so through the 1980's.

### **Growing a Dream**



In February 1987 Father Albert Todd, pastor of St. Mary's in Garner, began offering Mass in English and Spanish in leased space at Trinity Episcopal Church in Fuquay-Varina. For the next six months, services were held at the Episcopal Church, without taking collections and with the rent paid by a few parishioners.

As the new community of about thirty-six foundation families continued with its formation (*see Appendix IV*), Father Todd became convinced of the commitment among the people in the Fuquay-Varina area to pursue the formation of their own parish.

In April 1987 the first Mass as a Catholic mission church was held in Fuquay-Varina. Shortly thereafter, Catholics in the community gathered together, and at the urging of John Byrne, selected the name St. Bernadette's for the new mission church, thus recalling the town's past as Fuquay Springs.

William Fuquay, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, moved his family here and purchased land in 1805. Around 1858 his son Stephen, or possibly his grandson David Crockett, uncovered a mineral spring which seemed to have healing powers.

St. Bernadette discovered a “healing spring” that is known as the Shrine to the Virgin Mary at Lourdes, France.

People visited Fuquay spring for its healing powers just as people continue to visit St. Bernadette’s healing spring.



In June of 1989, Myrtle Hopson wrote to Bishop Gossman and offered to donate ten acres of land as a site for the church. In addition to the donation of land, an anonymous donor contributed \$100,000 to the parish building fund with the stipulation

that an additional \$50,000 be raised by members of the parish. After Myrtle Hopson’s death in 2001, it was announced that she had been the anonymous donor.

Some of the largest initial contributions of the seed money required to undertake such a project came from local Protestants who wanted to support the Catholic community.

The vision of these pioneers focused first on the need for a multi-purpose building to accommodate growth and provide a place for Mass and other worship services.

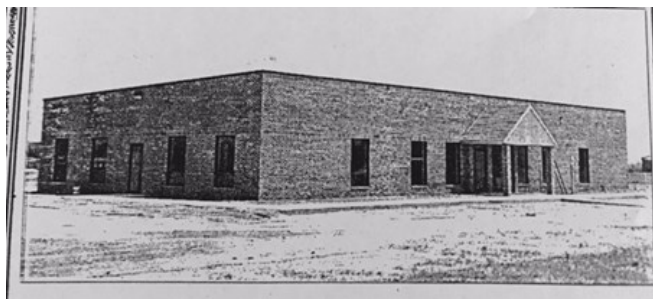
Even more important, it would provide a place for CCD and other parish gatherings.

A small group met to study building options and make preliminary plans. It was a frustrating learning process for this young mission church congregation, without experience in diocesan regulations or the complex business of church construction.

Father Albert Todd retired in July of 1989. At that time Bishop Gossman saw that the momentum to start a parish was not only continuing, but growing in intensity and funding. In July 1989 Sister Elizabeth McNeill was appointed as pastoral administrator. The Diocese of Raleigh initially paid for the first year's salary with subsequent prorated contributions to be made to the salary for the next several years. This was considered a loan until the new parish could become financially stable. Having the pastoral administrator gave the parishioners the impetus to start the construction process.

After some debate and setbacks, Bobbitt Associates, Inc. was chosen as the design-builder, and construction plans were finalized. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on February 3, 1990, for the St. Bernadette Catholic Community Parish Center.

The multipurpose Parish Center, now used as the parish social hall, provided not only a place for Mass, but for ministries to meet, as well.



Sister Elizabeth McNeill and Parish Council members took formal possession of the Parish Center in June 1990. The first Mass and open house were held on June 24, 1990. Dedication ceremonies were celebrated on September 16, 1990, when parishioners were reminded that, “This is God’s Church. It does not belong to any cultural community; instead, He simply allows us all to use it.” The dedication marked the culmination of a tremendous effort put forth by the Catholic community in Fuquay-Varina. It was accomplished by the sacrifice, dedication and unselfish work of many parishioners.

In September 1990 Sister Kitty Bethea was assigned to our parish as the administrator for the Hispanic members of our parish, and through her, the migrant ministry began. Sister Kitty officially began the “Raleigh Deanery Catholic Hispanic Ministry” on July 1, 1991, at St. Bernadette’s.



The Hispanic outreach ministry used the Parish Center for its fundraising and meals, as well as for medical services and other social outreach programs.

## **The Growing Years**

Father Charles “Charlie” Mulholland became St. Bernadette’s first Parish Priest on July 1, 1989, and remained until his retirement in 1998. Father Richard Doherty became our second priest.

During 1991 the parish was in need of a Parish Administrator to take care of day-to-day operations. Larry Williams, a parishioner of the mission church, served in this role until 1992.

In 1994 Sister Claudia Bronsing was assigned to our parish as the new Pastoral Administrator after Sister Elizabeth moved back to New York State. Sister Claudia saw the need for our parish to grow again. A new Construction and Architectural Committee was formed, and a Capital Campaign began for the new Sanctuary.

Balzar and Associates was chosen as the Architect and McDonald York Construction was selected as the building Contractor, and on April 2, 2000, the groundbreaking ceremony was held.

On July 14, 2001, Bishop Gossman dedicated the new Sanctuary, which had a seating capacity of 600.

In June, 2002, Fr. Fernando Torres began serving as Parish Hispanic Priest, while continuing his duties as the Diocesan Vicar for Hispanics. He continued in this role until June 2003.



In July 2003 Sister Claudia accepted a new assignment, and Father Doherty's assignment also ended. Father Doug Smiley was assigned as the first resident priest to be our Pastor.

Father Doug was re-assigned in June 2004, and Father Mark J. Betti became the second resident Pastor.

St Bernadette remained a mission church of St. Mary Mother of the Church Parish until 2004 when it was established as an independent Parish.

By 2008 there had been a tremendous influx of Catholics into the Fuquay-Varina area and the church could no longer hold all of the families for Mass. The Parish Center could no longer accommodate Faith Formation classes and all of the other activities taking place in our growing parish.

Once again we found ourselves conducting a Capital Campaign to build the John Paul II Learning Center and expand our sanctuary. Cannon Architects and Clancy & Theys Construction Company were selected for the project.

Groundbreaking for the John Paul II Learning Center was held on March 22, 2009. We took possession of the Learning Center in January 2010. The Learning Center serves both as an educational center and as the administrative center for parish offices and outreach.

On May 10, 2010, an expansion of the existing sanctuary began. Using the sanctuary that was built in 2001 as the “core” allowed the parish to save more than half what it would have cost to build a completely new sanctuary. The sanctuary was doubled in size to a seating capacity of 1200 by knocking out the end walls, doubling the size of the floor, increasing the size of the altar and rebuilding the walls, highlighted with stained glass including an 8 foot “rose window” at each end.

In July 2010 Father Fernando Torres became St. Bernadette’s third resident Pastor.

During the expansion, Masses were once again held in the Parish Center, but by December 2010 they were returned to the newly expanded sanctuary. We had occupation of the building in January 2011, and it was formally dedicated on February 6, 2011.

On August 18, 2011, the whole parish rejoiced as longtime parishioner John Byrne was presented with the Papal Benemereti medal for dedicated service to the Catholic Church.

On April 15, 2012, Bishop Michael Burbidge presided at the twenty-fifth (25<sup>th</sup>) anniversary celebration Mass.

### **The Journey Continues**

By June 2017, the parish had grown again, and shows many signs of good health:

- 2894 registered families
- 880 children attending Faith Formation
- 174 Baptisms
- 208 First Communions
- 98 Confirmations
- 14 weddings

In April 2017 the parish priests occupied a new rectory constructed within a mile of the parish campus. This new rectory will serve the clergy, parish guests, and parishioners for many years into the future.

We continue to find new solutions to embrace all the faithful who have chosen St. Bernadette's Parish as their Church family. Our goal is to meet the spiritual needs of all the parishioners who call our parish their "spiritual home." It takes the work of the entire Church community to make that happen.

The parish community continues to grow together into one body, as two very separate cultural communities are becoming more unified in many of the efforts within our Church and parish.

Looking forward, the parish will continue building upon its strong foundation by:

- Discovering Our Past
- Rejoicing in the Present
- Uniting for the Future

**We are St. Bernadette Parish Community !**

**We Are St. Bernadette  
Parish Community**

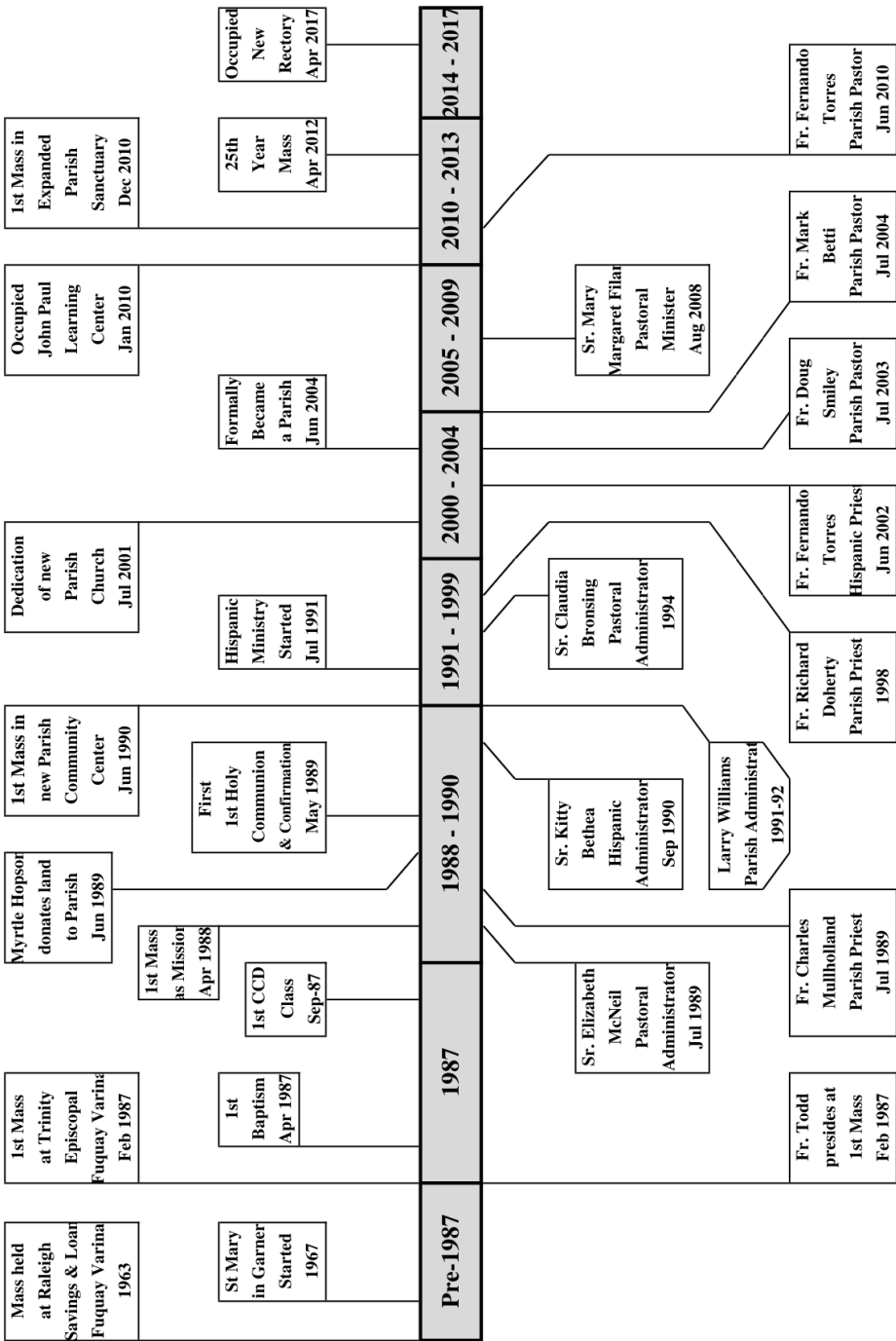


**Discover our Past,  
Rejoice in our Present,  
Unite for our Future.**

# Appendix I: Parish Timeline

## MILESTONES

## CLERGY & ADMIN



## Appendix II

### Key Dates in Parish History

<b>1963</b>	Mass was briefly offered in the Raleigh Savings & Loan Building, Fuquay Varina.
<b>1967</b>	St. Mary Mother of the Church Parish established in Garner and included Fuquay-Varina. Myrtle Hopson donated the church organ and was the organist. Wilton Scholl served as lector, and his two sons were altar servers.
<b>February 1987</b>	First St. Bernadette's Mass held at Trinity Episcopal Church by Fr. Albert Todd.
<b>April 1987</b>	Assigned as mission church of St. Mary Mother of the Church in Garner.
<b>April 1987</b>	First Baptism: Kellie Wieskamp
<b>September 1987</b>	First CCD Classes held: Michelle Dexter, coordinator
<b>April 1988</b>	First Mass of St. Bernadette Mission Church
<b>June 1988</b>	First Bulletin published by Margaret Beaver
<b>1988</b>	Women's Guild and Men's Guild formed
<b>Fall, 1988</b>	Fr. Paul Byron, Diocese of Raleigh, leads detailed parish planning
<b>August 1988</b>	First Parish Council elections and meeting

## Appendix II

### Key Dates in Parish History—cont.

<b>September 17, 1988</b>	First Holiday Bazaar
<b>October 1988</b>	St. Bernadette's first Fun Festival
<b>Nov / Dec 1988</b>	First Thanksgiving food baskets & Giving Tree
<b>February 1989</b>	First Valentines Dance
<b>May 6, 1989</b>	First Holy Communion
<b>May 13, 1989</b>	First Confirmation from Parish
<b>June 1989</b>	Myrtle Hopson donates 10 acres of land for first St. Bernadette's building. Sister Elizabeth McNeil becomes Pastoral Administrator
<b>July, 1989</b>	Father Charles Mulholland becomes Parish Priest
<b>December 1989</b>	First convert: Nada McNabb
<b>February 3, 1990</b>	Groundbreaking ceremony for St. Bernadette's Community Parish Center
<b>June 24, 1990</b>	First Mass in new multi-purpose building
<b>September 1990</b>	Sister Kitty Bethea starts Parish Migrant Ministry



## Appendix II

### Key Dates in Parish History—cont.

<b>September 16, 1990</b>	Dedication ceremony for the Parish Community Center
<b>July 1991</b>	First Vacation Bible School
<b>July 1991</b>	The Raleigh Deanery Catholic Hispanic Ministry begins
<b>December 7, 1997</b>	Knights of Columbus Council #12119 is chartered by the Parish Men's Guild
<b>1998</b>	Father Richard Doherty becomes Parish Priest
<b>April 2, 2000</b>	Groundbreaking ceremony for new Church
<b>July 14, 2001</b>	New Church dedicated by Most Reverend Joseph F. Gossman, Bishop of Raleigh.
<b>June, 2002</b>	Father Fernando Torres, Diocesan Vicar for Hispanics, becomes parish Hispanic Priest
<b>July 2003</b>	Father Doug Smiley becomes first resident Parish Pastor
<b>June, 2004</b>	St. Bernadette designated as a Parish
<b>July 2004</b>	Father Mark J. Betti becomes second resident Parish Pastor

## Appendix II

### Key Dates in Parish History—cont.

<b>January 2005</b>	Father William Rodriguez appointed Parochial Vicar
<b>July 10, 2007</b>	Father Marco Antonio Gonzalez-Hernandez appointed Parochial Vicar
<b>August 2008</b>	Sister Mary Margaret Filan, IHM appointed Pastoral Minister
<b>January 2009</b>	Father Robert Staley assigned as Parochial Vicar
<b>February 2009</b>	Father Jim Dull assigned as Parochial Vicar
<b>April 2009</b>	Father Kamil Alchouefati is assigned In Residence
<b>July 2009</b>	Father Francisco “Chesco” Javier Garcia-Gonzales assigned as Parochial Vicar
<b>January, 2010</b>	New John Paul II Family Learning Center was occupied
<b>July 2010</b>	Father Fernando Torres becomes third resident Parish Pastor
<b>December 4, 2010</b>	Masses resume in newly expanded 1200 seat sanctuary

**Appendix II**  
**Key Dates in Parish History—cont.**

February 6, 2011	Expanded Sanctuary is re-dedicated by Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of Raleigh.
August 18, 2011	Papal Benemereti Medal for dedicated service awarded to John Byrne.
September 2013	Father Roch T. Drozdzik assigned as Parochial Vicar
June 2014	Father Gregory Anatuanya assigned as Parochial Vicar
June 2015	Father Ian Van Heusen assigned as Parochial Vicar
April 2017	New rectory occupied
July 2017	Father Ryan Elder assigned as Parochial Vicar

## Appendix III

### Clergy and Pastoral Administration

February 1987	Father Albert Todd
June 1989	Sister Elizabeth McNeil, Pastoral Administrator
July 1, 1989	Father Charles Mulholland, first Parish Priest
September, 1990	Sister Kitty Bethea, Migrant Ministry
1991 - 1992	Parishioner Larry Williams serves as Parish Administrator
1994	Sister Claudia Bronsing, Pastoral Administrator
1998	Father Richard Doherty, Parish Priest
July 2003	Father Doug Smiley, first resident Pastor
July 2004	Father Mark J. Betti, resident Pastor
July 2005	Father William Rodriguez, Parochial Vicar
July 10, 2007	Father Marco Antonio Gonzalez-Hernandez, Parochial Vicar
July 2008	Father Luis Angel Hurtado, Parochial Vicar
August 2008	Sister Mary Margaret Filan, IHM, Pastoral Minister
January 2009	Father Robert Staley, Parochial Vicar
February 2009	Father Jim Dull, Parochial Vicar
April 2009	Father Kamil Alahouefati, assigned In Residence
July 2009	Father Francisco “Chesco” Javier Garcia-Gonzales, Parochial Vicar
July 2010	Father Fernando Torres, resident Pastor
September 2013	Father Roch T. Drozdzik, Parochial Vicar
June 2013	Father Gregory Anatuanya, Parochial Vicar
June 2015	Father Ian VanHeusen, Parochial Vicar
July 2017	Father Ryan Elder, Parochial Vicar

## **Appendix IV**

### **Foundation Families of St. Bernadette Parish**

1. Mark & Susan Alkire
2. Ann Marie Amico
3. Mary Battisto
4. George & Margaret Beaver
5. Mr. & Carol Bigda
6. Bernard & Jane Boik
7. Victor & Yvonne Bonilla
8. John & Patty Byrne
9. Steve & Nancy Catrine
10. Frank & Pat Cotton
11. William & Michelle Dexter
12. Steve & Eileen Dustin (son Brian was in first Holy Eucharist class)
13. Lee & Kim Evans
14. Christine Garrity
15. Albert & Mary Gibbons (Albert was first funeral)
16. Ann Gray
17. Dr. & Mrs. Bob (Lisa) Hammond
18. Myrtle Hopson
19. Sammy & Doris Jones
20. David & Pam Kelly
21. Mr. & Donna Kurtz
22. Ron & Helen LeBlond
23. Paul Ledak
24. Bill & Nada McNabb
25. Ed Majewski
26. Sharon Malcolm
27. Jeanne Murray
28. Judy Neville
29. Wilton & Ruby Scholl
30. David & Leslie Ann Seifert
31. Armond & Joan Soderos (wrote the hymn to St. Bernadette)
32. Debbie Strickland
33. Jerry & Rita Weiskemp (daughter Kelly was first Baptism)
34. Larry & Harriet Williams
35. Bob & Kathy Worley
36. Mr. & Mrs. Robert Young

## *Mensaje de Nuestro Párroco*

Celebremos nuestro trigésimo aniversario como comunidad parroquial, y celebremos con fe, porque Dios nos ha acompañado en medio de la pobreza, de la pequeñez de la comunidad, y las dificultades. Él nos ha regalado los talentos y la generosidad de muchas personas.

Esa es la historia que hoy vemos agradecidos, elevando nuestra plegaria al cielo y uniéndonos en torno al altar para celebrar el Sacramento de la Eucaristía que nos ha unido a lo largo de los años, que ha ayudado en el crecimiento de los niños, que ha alimentado a los demás por los actos de caridad, y que ha continuado resonando en los corazones de los que forman parte de otra comunidad: son una parte de “Saint Bernadette Parish”. Este mismo misterio nos une con los que han partido para la eternidad, porque confiamos participar con ellos un día del banquete celestial.

Con esta herencia, celebramos nuestra historia para ayudarnos a vivir nuestro presente, pensando en el llamado de seguir creciendo no solo en las casi 3000 familias registradas en la parroquia, sino haciendo presente a la Iglesia Católica en el sureste del condado de Wake con nuestra fe y con nuestras obras. Este crecimiento se construye por la unidad y la solidaridad en medio de tantas actividades y tantos ministerios, pero principalmente en la celebración de la Sagrada Eucaristía.

Que María Santísima interceda por toda nuestra comunidad para que podamos acercarnos cada día más a su Hijo amado y recibir de El todas las bendiciones para nuestra comunidad de Saint Bernadette.

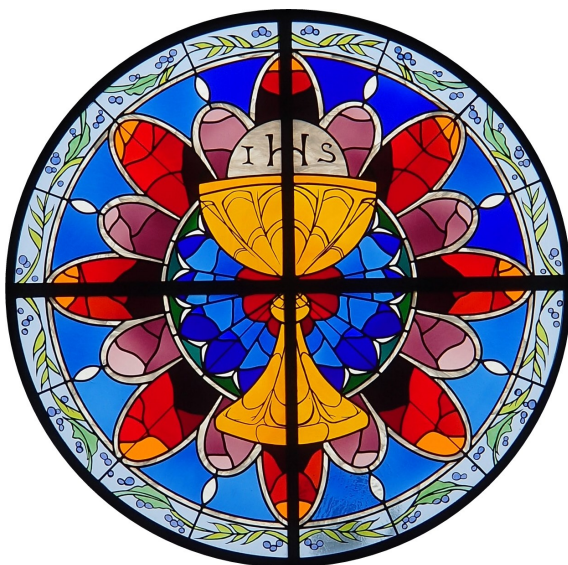
En Cristo,

*Padre Fernando Torres*

Párroco.



*Somos una comunidad católica multicultural donde todos son bienvenidos y las necesidades de expansión de nuestra parroquia son compartidas unos con otros. Celebramos la presencia de Dios y proclamamos la Buena Nueva de Jesucristo entre nosotros .*



*We are a multi-cultural Catholic Community where all are welcomed and the ever-expanding needs of our parish are ministered to by one another. We work toward celebrating the Presence of God and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in our midst.*



# SAINT BERNADETTE CATHOLIC CHURCH

## Mass Times

### Sunday (English)

5:00 pm (*Saturday Vigil*)

7:45 am

9:30 am

11:30 am

### Domingo (español)

1:30 pm

5:00 pm

## Daily Mass

9:00 am Monday, Wednesday,  
Thursday, Friday

6:30 pm Tuesday

