

# Sacred Heart of Jesus celebrates first Mass with added communities

When it was first announced in February that St. Michael Parish in Fells Point was closing and joining an expanding bilingual community at Sacred Heart of Jesus a mile away in Highlandtown, longtime parishioner Pamela Perc wasn't sure what to do.

She took comfort in the words of Redemptorist Father Robert F. Wojtek, the pastor who would be going from St. Michael to Sacred Heart.

"He reiterated the fact that the church is not the building, it's the people," Perc said. "I said 'This is my community and I'm going to follow them.' "

She took one last, long look at her parish of 40 years and journeyed to the future Aug. 7, joining a Eucharistic procession to Sacred Heart of Jesus. Once there, they celebrated their first Mass at Sacred Heart, which is now the Archdiocese of Baltimore's hub of Hispanic ministry. Spanish-speaking parishioners of Our Lady of Pompei were also encouraged to attend Sacred Heart of Jesus in recent months.

"It's like the Lord keeps talking to me, saying this is where I'm supposed to be," Perc said. "I'm very hopeful. It's going to be a surprise to see how many of our people are going to be there."

St. Patrick, formerly part of the Catholic Community of St. Michael and St. Patrick, is now a mission of Sacred Heart of Jesus and will host Sunday morning Spanish Mass.

Melissa Pelaez, a member of the newly created Sacred Heart of Jesus pastoral council, joined fellow former members of St. Michael in carrying flags displaying the many countries representing nationalities of parishioners. They walked down Fleet Street to Sacred Heart of Jesus, which will also be known as Sagrado Corazon de Jesus.

Father Wojtek walked in the procession, carrying the Blessed Sacrament at times and also leading the pilgrims in prayers. Once they arrived at Sacred Heart of Jesus,

Father Wojtek declared in both English and Spanish: "This is our new house, our new family, our new community. We come bringing the Lord Jesus, walking with us through the streets of Baltimore, blessing our streets, blessing our families, blessing our new community."

Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden walked to the back of the parish grounds and was presented the Blessed Sacrament.

Parishioners then filed into Sacred Heart of Jesus, studying their new home. Veteran Sacred Heart parishioners welcomed many who were getting used to their new surroundings.

The melding of many different communities was finally happening after months of planning by the archdiocese, the Redemptorists who administered both St. Michael and Sacred Heart of Jesus, and parishioners.

As Mass began, the song "Gather Us In" set the tone. Celebrant Bishop Madden looked out over the filled church and said, "It's wonderful for us to gather for the first time as a community, the community of Sacred Heart of Jesus. This is a blessed event."

Before he began his homily, Bishop Madden installed Father Wojtek as pastor, which drew enthusiastic applause. Former pastor Father Gerald J. Knapp has agreed to stay at the parish to ease the transition.

Speaking to parishioners during his homily, Bishop Madden said, "I am humbled by your fidelity, your goodness, your courage, your love and your willingness to listen."

Bishop Madden referenced Sacred Heart of Jesus' new mission statement and said the parish is dedicated to becoming a "thriving, multi-cultural, inter-generational faith community of Southeast Baltimore that will grow to celebrate the living Christ through cultural faith traditions in a diverse parish family."

Father Kevin Moley, the provincial for the Baltimore province of the Redemptorists, challenged parishioners to love each other and unite.

"Transitions are not easy," Father Moley said. "There will be winds, there'll waves

and there will be storms. Be the best community in the world. Be the best family in the world. Be the best people of the world. Be the church that has the name 'The Sacred Heart of Jesus.' "

The work now falls to the newly formed faith community in Highlandtown. Pamela Perc now looked to the future.

"Pray for us," Perc said. "We need lots of prayers."

### ***Sacred Heart of Jesus Mass Schedule***

#### **Weekend Masses:**

Saturday - 5 p.m., English

Sunday - 8:30 a.m., Spanish at St. Patrick; 10 a.m., English; 12:30 p.m. and 7 p.m., Spanish for both.

#### **Weekday Masses**

Monday-Saturday - 8 a.m.

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