

Newsletter of the Committee to Save St. Brigid Church

www.st-brigid.org

a nonprofit organization under Internal Revenue Code §501(c)(3)

July 1, 2003

Archdiocese, St. Brigid Church celebrate 150th, 140th anniversaries in 2003

The history of our Archdiocese would not be complete without retelling the pivotal contributions of St. Brigid Church. Bishop Joseph Alemany was consecrated bishop of Monterey in 1850, and in 1853 when the new Archdiocese of San Francisco was erected, he was transferred here to serve as our first archbishop.

Diocesan clergy were scarce in the early years of the Archdiocese, and Archbishop Alemany began the practice of lending the services of the Dominican friars to establish, care for, and manage San Francisco's first Catholic parishes. The first example of this was the establishment of St. Brigid's in 1863.

St. Brigid's was founded at the height of the American Civil War, 10 years after the founding of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Its parish boundaries were vast, comprising all the land north of Bush St., and all the land west from Larkin St. to the Pacific Ocean. Its boundary was expanded further in 1880, to Jones Street, so that



St. Brigid Church, 1964 (source: sfpl)

residents there could avoid scaling Russian Hill to reach Old St. Mary's or St. Francis of Assisi.

Taking over lands formerly assigned to the church of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Brigid's started out very much as a frontier parish, situated at the edge of the city, and encompassing a vast tract of land in San Francisco. Indeed, the only Catholic church lying farther from the city center at that time was Mission Dolores.

Like Mission Dolores, St. Brigid's boundaries were gradually reduced as settlement proceeded south and west: first by St. Mary's Cathedral parish (1886), then by St. Dominic's (1887), finally by St. Vincent de Paul (1901). In 1873, the Dominicans found a permanent home in the Western

(cont. on p.3)

June 30 this year, marked the ninth anniversary of the closing of St. Brigid Church. In commemoration of that solemn event, the Committee to Save St. Brigid Church held its annual vigil that evening. A Rosary, Mass and potluck took place, followed by a candle-lighting ceremony and prayer service. At that time, all present were encouraged to share their thoughts, feelings, reminiscences and ideas about St. Brigid's. The hour of reflection closed with the singing of "We Shall Overcome".

The initial goal of the project is to have the film air on local television or at a few film festivals. While furthering Neilus' film education, it would give the parishioners of St. Brigid an opportunity to voice their concerns and present their story to viewers.

Neilus wishes to thank all of the St. Brigid parishioners who participated in the film for their help and support during this "work in progress." He also wants to thank his colleague, Margaret Levine, for her assistance during the film project.

And St. Brigid thanks Neilus for helping to keep her cause in the public eye.



Neilus & Margaret, hard at work.

Saving St. Brigid - The Movie

The struggle to reopen St. Brigid Church is to be the subject of a film by student filmmaker Neilus O'Sullivan, of Mountain View. A native of County Kerry, Ireland, Neilus came to California in 1996, and is currently studying documentary filmmaking at DeAnza College. At present, Neilus is an electronics engineer for an Internet company, but was involved in radio broadcasting and engineering in Ireland. He has always been interested in stories of real people and issues, and of struggles against injustice.

Neilus discovered the plight of St. Brigid's during the recording of a radio documentary on pre-historic Celtic musical instruments. An associate mentioned their Irish connection with St. Brigid's, which piqued Neilus' curiosity. "When I went to a few of your parish events I was really struck by the spirit of community and the passion for the cause. I think it is a very special thing to find a community that is still so united eight years after their parish church has been closed. This is something everyone should know about - a story that should be told," Neilus stated.

Supervisor Newsom shows his support

(article inside)

2003 Calendar ... at a glance

- Feb. ... St. Brigid Feast Day Potluck
- Mar. ... St. Patrick's Day Parade
- 6/29 ... Church Cleanup
- 6/30 ... 9th Anniversary Vigil
- 7/26 ... Summer Picnic Mass
- 8/16 ... Summer Picnic Mass
- 9/10 ... 140th Anniversary of St. Brigid Church
- 10/25 ... Parish Fall Dinner
- Nov. ... Thanksgiving/Outreach
- Dec. ... Christmas Potluck

Gregory Peck

In Memoriam
(see inside page)

Helping the Homeless

An aspect of every parish church is its community involvement, and the help given to others in need. Although St. Brigid's Church has been closed for over nine years, the Committee's Outreach Program continues.

Having a special empathy for the homeless, donations of food, toiletry articles, socks and hats are given regularly to Martin DePorres House and clothing to St. Anthony's. These donations are received from parishioners, Committee members, and businesses solicited by the Committee.

Eight beautiful Easter baskets for elderly St. Brigid parishioners were assembled by Linda and Julie Shah, and David Joy, as part of their "Thanksgiving Once a Month" outreach program. Committee members received the baskets from St. Brigid's School, for distribution. The baskets were a pleasant surprise, and were happily received.



Chairman's Message

A CHURCH THAT WILL NOT DIE

Robert R. Bryan

Nine years have passed since the doors of St. Brigid Church were closed by the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Yet, the church community remains very much alive. Far from dying at midnight on June 30, 1994, the closure ignited a spark that has continued to grow. Never in the 140-year history of St. Brigid has there been a greater display of love for the church and what it represents to the faithful.

A small candle is always flickering at the entrance to St. Brigid. It is a symbol of an unwavering belief of the people in the future of the church.

The church building is in excellent condition. In fact, it could be easily reopened on very short notice. More importantly, the congregation remains intact and active. Through the Committee to Save St. Brigid Church, there is ongoing communication among the parishioners. Their elected representatives meet weekly, minister to the needy, and keep the area around the church clean and beautiful. St. Brigid even has a championship soccer team. Throughout the year the church is involved in various other activities. For example, St. Brigid annually sponsors an award winning float in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. There are dinners that are always sold out, potlucks, outdoor Masses, picnics and Christmas parties. The sense of community among the parishioners could not be stronger.

The parishioners are driven by an unshakeable faith that St. Brigid will be opened. That is not a pipe dream, but a logical conclusion if one looks at the facts. There is no Catholic church in the community. People have been left without a place to worship. The children of St. Brigid School study and play in the shadow of the church. It defies reason that they are barred from entering. The community's thirst for its own church cannot be satisfied until the doors of St. Brigid are flung open.

The need for St. Brigid is recognized far beyond the many who wish to worship there. In recent years the San Francisco

Board of Supervisors has passed two resolutions recognizing its vital importance to our city. This spring Supervisor Gavin Newsom wrote Archbishop William Levada, asking that he open St. Brigid.

People attended St. Brigid Church in large numbers for over a hundred years. Their financial contributions were substantial. Consequently St. Brigid always operated in the black, supporting not only a great school but also the Archdiocese.

Tonight a small candle is glowing on the steps of St. Brigid. This simple but eloquent symbol of the parishioners' faith will continue to glow until the church is once more open for people in the community to enter and worship. St. Brigid Church will not die.

St. Brigid's Men Win 5th Title

Congratulations to the St. Brigid Mariners Young Men's soccer team, who won the San Francisco Diocesan League title on May 17, 2003!

The final game was played against the Panthers of Holy Name of Jesus Church, and was the culmination of an undefeated season. The 2 - 1 win was the fifth such victory in eleven years of the Mariner's participation in the league. The team is coached by Fr. Cyril O'Sullivan, who began the league in 1983.

The league currently consists of eight teams, representing the parishes of Apostleship of the Sea, St. Anne, St. Brigid, St. Cecilia, St. Gabriel, Holy Name, St. Philip and St. Stephen.



St. Brigid's Mariner soccer team with coach Fr. Cyril O'Sullivan at soccer final.

Supervisor Newsom

Supervisor Gavin Newsom put his support for Archbishop William J. Levada asking him to reopen St. Brigid Church. It is no surprise to the many parishioners and friends of St. Brigid that Supervisor Newsom has attended many St. Brigid Church resolutions regarding St. Brigid Church and the work

GAVIN NEWSOM
Board of Supervisors
City and County of San Francisco



February 26, 2003

The Most Reverend William J. Levada
The Archdiocese of San Francisco
1 Peter Yorke Way
San Francisco, California 94109-6602

Re: St. Brigid Church

Dear Archbishop Levada:

Please accept this as my request for you to open St. Brigid Church, a place of historical importance to San Francisco, and its act of opening St. Brigid to our community and City.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to open St. Brigid Church to San Francisco on August 23, 1999 and November 19, 2002. The Board of Supervisors commended the parishioners for their ongoing "stewardship" of the church, its architecture and cultural history of Saint Brigid Church. St. Brigid Church stands a better, cleaner, and safer place to live and work. The "Committee to Save Saint Brigid Church" of San Francisco by outreach to the neighborhood. The Department of the Interior has recognized the architectural significance of St. Brigid Church by declaring it eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

You may rest assured that I remain available to you for any questions of great importance to our citizens.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,
Gavin Newsom
Board of Supervisors

Shows His Support

...aving St. Brigid Church in writing when he wrote the church. The Supervisor's support should come as St. Brigid who continue to work to have the church ... Brigid dinners, and has written two commendatory done by the Committee to save it.



Supervisor Newsom speaking at our Fall Dinner in Oct. 2002

1 Dr. Carlton B. Newsom
San Francisco
email: C...
www.ci.sf.ca...

... St. Brigid Church. The building is of great historic use would greatly enhance the wellbeing of

...ously passed resolutions supporting the opening ... er 5, 2001. Each recognized the importance of ... tly signed by Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr. We ... ervice and efforts to preserve the use and archi- ... h ... and to make the neighborhood in which it ... d work by its preservation." We also noted that ... tines to provide social service to the needy of ... and pointed out that the United States Depart- ... rnal and historical significance of the church by ... Historic Places.

... provide support in this endeavor, since it is of

...ry truly,
... Newsom
... of Supervisors

Archdiocese, St. Brigid

(cont. from p.1)

Addition, and in 1875 left St. Brigid Church to the care of the diocesans.

The original St. Brigid Church was completed in 1864, a plain wooden one-story building, 40' wide by 76' long, on the southwest corner of Van Ness & Broadway. It was built atop a 15-foot high sand dune, and entered by ascending a flight of wooden steps.

In October 1889, Father John Cottle was appointed pastor of St. Brigid's, and the next 37 years of his pastorate saw the whole area built up with stately Victorian homes. Sensing a pressing need for a more stately church than the one erected in 1864, Fr. Cottle undertook plans for the present St. Brigid Church in 1896.

As the City's muddy streets were gradually paved over, Fr. Cottle deftly purchased old granite curbstones and crossing stones—"stones of history" from San Francisco's early days—and stored them on a vacant part of the church lot, to be used in the building of St. Brigid Church.

The foundation and basement of the church were completed in 1897, and the crypt opened for Divine Services later that year. Work on the superstructure began in August 1900 and was completed in December 1904, making St. Brigid's the first church in San Francisco to be constructed of enduring granite. Due in part to this sturdy construction, the 1906 earthquake and fire damaged but did not destroy St. Brigid's. The church was quickly repaired and recommissioned about 8 months later, on Dec. 16, 1906.

As the Archdiocese of San Francisco celebrates its 150th anniversary, we would also like to celebrate St. Brigid's 140 years of membership in that same great Catholic family.

We hope and pray that the church will be reopened someday soon, so that others can enjoy and worship inside that place which the commentators wrote nearly a century ago:

"[Its] exterior is worthy of contemplation, [but] it's only upon entering the sacred edifice that its real beauty may be appreciated ... one is all but overwhelmed by the grandeur of the interior ... in style, character, proportion, and materials, it stands preeminently as the most beautiful sacred edifice in San Francisco." (1904)

St. Brigid Church—that "beautiful and magnificent granite structure ... in which the people of generations yet unborn will come to pay divine adoration to Almighty God, stands as a silent and permanent witness ... a magnificent granite structure, whose very construction spells permanency, and whose outlines and interior fittings proclaim the "beauty of God's house and the place where His Glory dwelleth'." (1913)

Sources: San Francisco Monitor, Christmas 1904; St. Brigid Church "Golden Jubilee Souvenir", September 1913; Matthew Brady, The Independent, June 2, 1998, p. 27. Photo source: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

St. Brigid Church, 1952 (source: sfp)



St. Brigid Wins "Best Cable Car"

Another important anniversary was observed this year by St. Brigid's Church. For the 10th consecutive year, it was represented in San Francisco's St. Patrick's Day Parade, held on Sunday, March 16. Parishioners and friends participated by marching and riding down Market Street, to the cheers of thousands of



2003 St. Patrick's Day Parade

spectators. This year, the 1st Place for "Best Cable Car" was awarded to the Committee to Save St. Brigid Church. Many thanks to the decoration crew, for their hard work!

In Memoriam

Our longtime patron, Gregory Peck, passed away on June 12, 2003. We extend our condolences and prayers to his family. Gregory Peck's mother, the late Bernice Maysuch, was a parishioner of our church. In supporting the cause of saving St. Brigid's, Mr. Peck wrote: "I do this in memory of my Mother."

The goal of the Committee to Save St. Brigid Church is to continue the work of Jesus Christ in this community. We represent the parishioners and thousands of others who believe that the closure of St. Brigid was wrong and contrary to the very essence of Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. We present this newsletter so you may be better informed of our efforts.

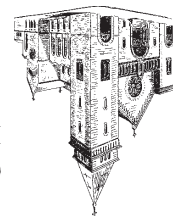
The Committee can be reached either at P.O. Box 641318, San Francisco, CA 94164-1318 or at (415) 364-1511 or at info@st-brigid.org.

Officers & Subcommittees

- Chairman Robert R. Bryan, Esq.
- Vice Chairs Ciaran Baynes,
Joseph H. Dignan, Kenneth W. Epley,
Helen Piscevich, Tillie Piscevich
- Secretaries .. Jan M. Robinson, Beatriz St. John
- Treasurer Joy D. Duffy
- Assistant Treasurer Denis J. Mulcahey
- Church Secretary Josephine Brightwell
- Parliamentarian Margaret Sanderson
- Legal Counsel Robert R. Bryan, Esq.,
William W. Van Way, Esq.,
Dr. Martha Wegan (Rome)
- Historical Preservation Kenneth W. Epley,
John M. Gregson, Ph.D.
- Engineering Robert L. Head
- Prayer Leaders Carmen Esteva, Maggie Zuniga
- Patron Gregory Peck

*Service
140 Years of
Church
St. Brigid*

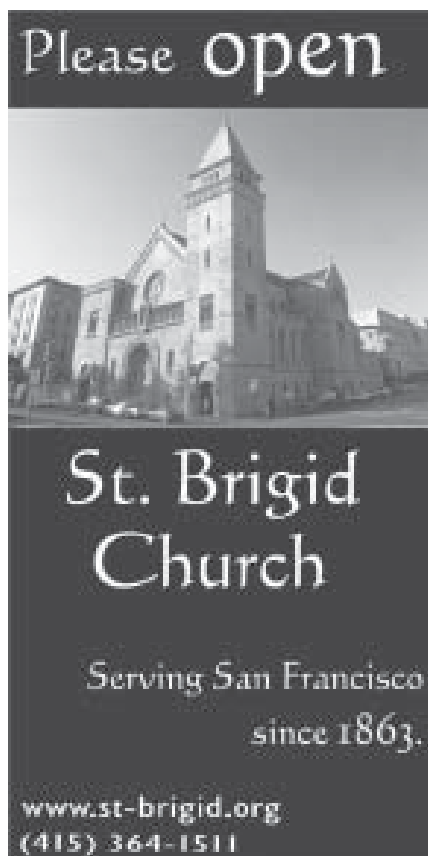
Committee to Save St. Brigid Church
P.O. Box 641318
San Francisco, CA 94164-1318
Address Service Request



Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 367
San Francisco

New
Banners over Broadway

The Committee's five-year old street banners have been replaced with a new design, shown at right. Some of the old banners had sustained wind damage in recent storms. The new hardware is much lighter, and more wind-resistive than the previous framework that was used. The banners can be seen along Broadway, between Franklin and the Broadway tunnel entrance.



Summer Picnic Masses

The Committee to Save St. Brigid Church would like to invite all parishioners and friends to attend a series of outdoor Masses, with potluck picnic following, at Lafayette Park (corner of Washington and Laguna Streets). The Masses begin at noon, and will be held on the following dates:

- Saturday, July 26
- Saturday, August 16

Our celebrant will be Fr. Cyril O'Sullivan. Please join us for these Masses and potlucks, in a beautiful outdoor setting. Families with children are especially welcome to attend!

How to Help

The Committee, as always, needs the support of parishioners and friends in our effort to save St. Brigid.

There are any number of ways parishioners can help in the work to save the Church: writing letters, attending our Wednesday night meetings, coming to Committee events and continuing the work of the Parish. The simplest, however, and one of the most helpful, is to continue your generous financial support of the Committee. Many parishioners have made additional contributions, frequently in conjunction with one of our events. These contributions make the work of the Committee possible.

All members and officers of the Committee serve without compensation.

Your contributions to the Committee are tax deductible and can be sent to:

Committee to Save St. Brigid Church
P.O. Box 641318
San Francisco, CA 94164-1318

Further information about the Committee's work is available on the web at <http://www.st-brigid.org>.

Thank you.

