



## ***A Brief History of St. Raphael Catholic Church***

*Springdale, Arkansas*

*December 1949 to June 2011\**

*In the fall of 1949, Reverend L.H. Schaefer, pastor of St. Joseph Church, Tontitown, presided over a preliminary organizational meeting of area Catholics to plan formation of a Catholic parish in Springdale. Father Schaefer celebrated the first Mass in Springdale at 9 AM, Sunday, December 4, 1949 in the Chapel of Callison-Sisco Funeral Home, on a cloth- draped ironing board.*

*Property at the corner of West Huntsville and North Shiloh streets was loaned to the new Mission of St. Raphael by Ms. Josephine Braun. The small house on the property was redecorated by the women of the Mission and re-roofed by the men of the Mission and made into a chapel. In February 1950 the Springdale Mission was named St. Raphael Cenacle in memory of Mrs. Braun's son, Raphael, who was killed in action in World War II.*

*The first Mass in the four room Cenacle was celebrated June 20, 1952; the celebrant was Reverend Thomas Kennedy of St. Joseph Parish, Tontitown. The first Altar boy was Joe Taldo. In March 1955, St. Raphael Mission was dedicated by Archbishop William O'Brien, President of the Catholic Extension Society. The Mission membership had grown from forty-five to seventy-eight persons.*

*In the early fifties, land at the corner of West Sunset (Highway 412) and South West End Street was purchased from the W.C. Rogers Family for \$30,000. Through the excitement and direction of Pastor Jesse Cheney, three and one half years later, the dreams of the Mission members were fulfilled when Albert L. Fletcher, Bishop of Little Rock, dedicated the new St. Raphael Catholic Church on the thirty –three acre tract of land. On September 3, 1965, St. Raphael Mission became a true self-supporting Parish and Reverend Francis J. Janesko became the first resident pastor. Membership in that year surpassed one hundred persons.*

*Another milestone was reached in February 1967, when a rectory and parish hall were completed. St. Raphael Parish continued to grow and expand when the education wing was added to the Parish Hall in 1982. The Hall was used for Patron Saint's Day dinners, fund-raisers, and monthly dances; as well as education and formation of our children, youth and converts. Membership reached five hundred fifty people.*

*In 1987, under the leadership of Reverend Milton Lange, who served as Pastor for more than 23 years, committees were appointed to gather ideas and needs for an expanded sanctuary with administration/education space. To determine what the church needed, a survey was developed within the Building Committee which then went to the members to decide style, facilities, and design before the plan was drawn by the architect. The Building Committee made a recommendation to build a church that*

*could seat 850 people at the 10:30 Mass within two years of completing the new church complex. The committee believed the sanctuary should be able to expand to accommodate 1250 at one Mass.*

*That flexibility was designed into the plans. The building project was completed and the building was dedicated by Andrew J. McDonald, Bishop of Little Rock on May 14, 1995. The Parish membership had grown to five hundred forty families.*

*From the prayers and dedication of many, the Sacred Heart Chapel of Perpetual Adoration opened on April 5, 1999. Catholics of St. Raphael Parish and nearby parishes signed up to cover one hour of Adoration for all 168 hours of the week. Within one month 1,000 adorers had signed up and participated during a single week period.*

*By 1999, the Hispanic Community added a great dimension of heritage, music and dedication to St. Raphael Parish. There were more than 400 families of Hispanic heritage under the care of the Vincentian priests Father Miles Heinen and Father Rex Hayes, Father Jim Fisher as well as Father David Nations. Two Hispanic Deacons were serving the Parish to assimilate and serve the Hispanic families: Deacon Al Cazada and Deacon Jesus Perez. A Spanish Mass was added at 2PM, as well as other sacraments in Spanish. Most did not have their sacraments. Many were new arrivals to the U.S. and living hand to mouth. Only a few Hispanic families were "active" in the parish and even fewer were willing to act as leaders. By the fall of 1999 the Parish combined membership had grown to more than 1,340 Anglo and Hispanic families with nearly two thousand attending four weekend Masses. From our Anglo & Hispanic families, we had more than five hundred children and youth participating weekly in CCD, CYM and Unidos en Cristo.*

*In 2000, the parish began selling a few Catholic gift items from the glass case in the vestibule by the Church office. In 2001, many changes occurred in the parish, as Reverend Scott Friend arrived at St. Raphael. Parish membership grew at a rapid rate that continues even until today. In December of 2001, the first Our Lady of Guadalupe Mass was celebrated .*

*In 2002, new staff were hired, including Deacon Chuck Marino arrived from St. Joseph's in Fayetteville. Many changes to all internal office functions and procedures began and to this day, continue to evolve. A grant was received to have the Carmelite Sisters come to the parish to train Hispanic leaders and develop a Catechism program in Spanish. In August, Carmelite Sisters arrived. They started working with the Spanish speaking families. They started "house groups". They would go to different homes and have several families come together to have bible study/prayer group. They worked with the youth to train them to take leadership roles. They worked with PRE and taught the parents as well as the children. They also helped with all the sacrament preparations, music ministry, extraordinary ministers, ushers and lectors. One of their goals was to develop leaders spiritually so they could lead prayer groups, PRE and sacrament preparation classes. In the fall, a larger gift shop opened in a room in the corner of the existing parish hall, ESL classes with volunteers began and a 7PM Mass in Spanish was added to help with the increasing number of Hispanics attending Mass.*

*From the fall of 2002 through 2004, many more changes took place at St. Raphael due to the increasing number of Hispanics at the parish. The parish received a three year grant from the Vincentians for Hispanic ministry in NW Arkansas. A program leader was not found until May of 2004 when Dionicio "Nicho" Vazquez took that position. He started three programs. The first was the 'Family*

*Prayer Group'. He taught classes on how to use the materials in the family home and developed this prayer program for hundreds of families in NW Arkansas. The second was the 'Family Retreat Program, where h He taught and developed leaders on how to present these types of retreats. The third program was the "Radio Ministry" where he developed a format for a weekly radio program to be aired on the local Spanish radio station. Nicho left when the grant expired in May 2007 to work for the Diocese of Little Rock.*

*Between the Carmelite Sisters and Nicho's programs most of the Hispanic ministries were started and continue to this day. It was also during this time that Cursillo retreats for both Anglos and Hispanics began. Large numbers in both communities attended, especially the Hispanics. In February 2003, the parish received a grant for a ESL program which included a computer lab. Classes were held two to three times a week and many attended these classes. This program ended, however, when the parish started the building project and there was no space. Attendance had dropped over time as other resources became available and there were fewer and fewer new arrivals to the area. That same year, the 8AM English Mass was moved to 7AM to accommodate a 3rd Spanish Mass at 8:30AM. By early 2004, the parish paid off the 1995 debt to the Diocese for the new Church and at that time, early stages of planning for a building addition started.*

*In the summer of 2004, a new rectory was purchased, and the old rectory was remodeled into a preschool which opened in August of 2004. In the summer of 2005, a house for the Carmelite sisters was purchased. In prior years, the parish rented property for them. By 2006 a larger parking lot was completed to accommodate for the ever growing need for more parking spaces for the now 5 Sunday Masses. In June 2006, monthly Spanish Food Sales begun; for the first few years, just during the warm months outside. Later, after the building was completed, the sales moved inside for colder months, but not during November thru February.*

*In the fall of 2006, the 1st International Dinner and Auction was held. St. Raphael Day which had begun in 2002 was expanded to include games and entertainment as well as food.*

*In August of 2007, St. Raphael Catholic School opened (PreK to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) with Mrs. Karen LaMendola as principal. Each year since 2007, an additional grade has been added. Currently, the school offers instruction through 6th grade, with a 7th grade class being added in the fall of 2011. During the fall of 2007, construction began for new family life center and meeting rooms. This addition was completed in the spring of 2008 with landscaping completed that summer. A newly expanded gift shop opened in spring 2008 when the building was complete. In February, a 5:15 bi-lingual Mass was added but was changed to a Spanish Mass in 2010 due to the increasing number of Spanish parishioners. In 2010, the food sales expanded to every month and the parish council was revamped.*

*The parish of St. Raphael has had many changes over its 62 years of history. From a Mass in a funeral home on a ironing board in late 1949 to a vibrant, diverse and large community of 201, St. Raphael Church has been the largest parish in the Diocese for 9 years now with over 20,500 members. Our PRE classes have grown to 1400-1500 students every year. Youth ministry both in Spanish and in English have grown and expanded. Currently the parish has 70 active ministries; 34 in English and 36 in Spanish. There are 7 weekend Masses; 3 in English and 4 in Spanish. Hundreds are baptized ever year, 50 weddings take place each and every year, and thousands take advantage of the sacrament of Reconciliation offered many times each week. There are over 80 students in our school and 40 children in*

our pre-school. The parish staff has grown to 22 including volunteers and the school staff is over 25 strong.

*Pastors who served St. Raphael as a mission were: Reverend Schaefer 1949 -1951, Reverend Kennedy 1951-1955, Reverend Jesse Cheney 1955 - 1964, & Reverend Joseph Quinn 1964 -1965. Resident Pastors who served this Parish were Reverend Francis J. Janesko 1965 -1969, Reverend Edward J. McCormick 1969-1970, Reverend Milton R. Lange, 1970-1980 and 1983-1996, Reverend Amos Enderlin, 1980-1983, Father Joseph Correnti 1996-2001(as sacramental minister only), Father Scott Friend 2001-2005, Father John Antony 2005-2009, and Father John Connell 2009 to present.*

*The parish has had many associate pastors over the past 14 years; too many to name, but Diocesan associate pastors include; Father Phillip Reaves, Father John Marconi, Father Salvador Marquez Muñoz, Father Jason Tyler and Father Rubén Quinteros.*

*Diocesan Deacons include Deacon Clarence Leis, and his wife Betty who served as Pastoral Administrator when Father Joseph Correnti was Sacramental Minister. And of course, Deacon Chuck Marino and his wife, Anita.*

*The future is bright for the St. Raphael Church. All of this was possible because of gracious and loving God, the visions of its pastors and the openness of its people. Through the intercession of St. Raphael, may Almighty God hear our prayers and bless us always. Amen.*

*\*Compiled from written history, minutes and newspaper clipping from Dolores A. Stamps thru November 1999. History from 1999 to present compiled by office staff as best as we can remember.*



*Stained- glass window on the east side of the Church depicting the story of creation from Genesis through the Birth of our Lord.*