

Christmas through the Years at St. Leo

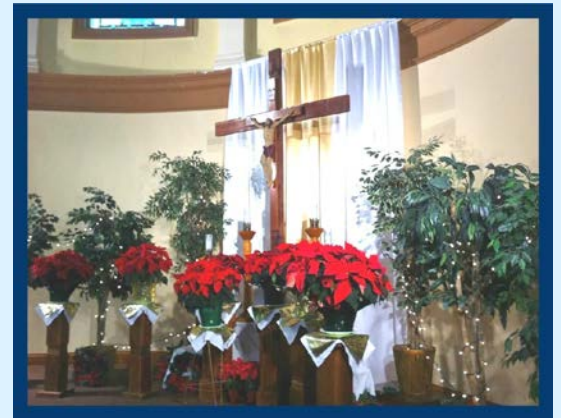


Customs and traditions of St. Leo parishioners may have changed the way Christmas has been celebrated in the past 130 years but the faith and fervor of parishioners has remained the same. The parish, originally founded by German immigrants over a century ago is once again home for immigrants and refugees—this time from Latin America and Africa who bring the gift of their cultures with them.

The first Christmas Mass in 1886 was celebrated on the second floor of a carpenter shop. From 1904 until 1911 when the current church building was dedicated services were held in the “catacombs” (church basement) while parishioners saved money to complete the building.

For many years Midnight Mass preceded by carols started the celebration. Most people returned for Mass on Christmas day before spending the day with family and friends.

The nativity crèche changed over the years. Originally there was a wooden stable that was later replaced by fresh Christmas trees serving as backdrop for the holy family, angels and shepherds. The Magi “inched along” from one side of the church to the stable in the days leading up to Epiphany. When Father Langenbrunner was pastor he built another stable that was used for many years.



In the 1960’s Sister Bernadette began a “give-away” to parishioners at Christmas bringing food and gifts. This soon expanded to the neighborhood and continues to this day.

For Guatemalan parishioners the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe who revealed herself in the garb of a peasant begins the holiday celebrations. On Christmas Eve they gather for a Christmas pageant, prayer and celebration.

Burundian parishioners dress in their finest clothing for Christmas and sing and dance to carols from their homeland.

In recent years, the Christmas choir has combined the traditions and music of all parishioners in a vocal and instrumental display of our unity through our diversity.

Epiphany evening prayer and international pot-luck supper has now become a new tradition we celebrate with our partner parishes.

God’s taking on our humanity and choosing to live among us was in 1886, is now in 2016, and will always continue to be, a cause for rejoicing and great celebration.

