

**IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CATHEDRAL  
PHILADELPHIA, PA  
JANUARY 16, 2011**



Christ Is Born!

I am deeply grateful to His Grace, Metropolitan Stefan Soroka, and to Father Demkiv, Rector, for allowing us to be here today and to you dear parishioners and friends of Immaculate Conception Cathedral here in Philadelphia.

We have been anticipating this moment, our visit to your parish, for such a long time, for this is our last parish to visit.

Many of the sisters here today are familiar to you. They have at one time or another served your parish school, the cathedral, or the chancery within a span of 70 years... from 1937 at St. Mary's on Brown Street until August 2008 when they lived at 805 Franklin St.

Why are we here? And why today?

This has been a time of jubilee. We Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate embarked on a historical moment. 50 years ago, in 2009, we stood tall and strong, able to become a

province here in the United States. Last year 2010 marked 75 years that we have ministered and worked among God's people... people like you here in Philadelphia at the magnificent Immaculate Conception Cathedral.

We come here today, to say **THANK YOU!**

August 4, 1937, two years after the arrival of the first sisters to the United States, Bishop Constantine Bohachewsky, gifted the sisters with a three-story home on Brown St. Within two months time, he gave them another home on that same street. Here the sisters sewed priestly vestments, took care of elderly men and women and conducted evening school in Frankfort, PA. By June of 1939 a third home was added which housed young girls who worked in the local factories but had nowhere to live. Quickly, life on Brown street flourished so that by 1942..a span of five years, there were 30 residents and working girls living with the sisters, two sisters were teaching evening school at St. Josaphat's in Frankfort with catechetical classes for all ages as well as forming the junior sodality for girls and a children's choir. Thus began the life of the Sisters Servants in Philadelphia!

It would only be natural to begin an all day school with the influx of new immigrants and the need for educating the young children.

Ten years after their arrival on Brown St., 1947, Immaculate Conception Cathedral school was opened with 269 children. They provided meals for 200 children, 40 girls belonged to the Junior Sodality, along with 35 boys that were altar servers. They also cared for the beauty of the cathedral (still in its old location).

Twenty years into the schools history, we see the enrollment at 450 students, 65 sodality girls, 45 altar boys, and in these twenty years, there were 910 who made their First Holy Communion.

The sisters moved from the condemned Brown St. home to the 8<sup>th</sup> Street convent next to the new auditorium/hall. Along with them came the last living elderly woman Sadie, who the sisters cared for until her death. The sisters became her only family!

Life was no different from living on Brown St. Sisters continued to teach during the day, care for the cathedral, sew vestments, visit the sick in their homes and hospitals, teach catechism at Melrose Park, the neighboring parish.

Hosting the fathers for Christmas and Easter dinners and many a breakfast, became a tradition as did inviting the church choir for breakfast following those memorable feastdays.

Unfortunately, as the years unfold we see a decline in school enrollment as too the sisters who at one time were 10 in number at the Cathedral, dwindle to four and five. Sadly, the school closes its doors in June 1993.

Throughout those 46 years of the schools existence, you entrusted your children and grandchildren to our care. We instilled in their hearts a love of God and an understanding of Christian values. We educated them to be the future leaders of our country and church. A grave responsibility you gave to us, one that we honored and cherished!

**THANK YOU** for the trust you had in the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate.

The closing of the school opened new possibilities for the sisters.

By this time we see Sr. Thomas Hrynewich, serve as the Vice Chancellor for Metropolitan Stephen Sulyk. In time she becomes the first woman to hold the position of Chancellor for the diocese continuing to work with His Grace Metropolitan Stefan Soroka upon the retirement of Metropolitan Stephen Sulyk.

Sisters continue with the work of caring for the cathedral, decorating it and making the prosphora, teaching catechism in parishes, working in the rectory office with the late

Bishop Paska and Father Paul Wolensky. We even see Sr. Sozonta meeting with the ladies of the parish each week making the famous pyrohu.

Metropolitan Soroka envisioning a church in need of evangelization, opens the door for Sisters to hold positions in the office of catechetics, the office of Safe Environment in protecting God's children and the office of Youth Ministry all through the Archeparchy of Philadelphia.

During these countless years of service to the Cathedral and its parish family, the sisters helped to foster the vocations of many to the priesthood whether it be through the cathedral school or working with the various youth groups. Such is the case Father Ihor Midzak, Father Michael Wytish who were taught in the cathedral school.

By your love, your faith, your own witness, vocations to the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate have come from your parish family. You gave the Sisters Servants your greatest treasure... your children!

Some came for a given amount of time, gave all that they could in service to others. Others have already entered into their eternal reward.

We pray that others may follow their example and once again from your parish family, young men and women may come to become the future priests and religious sisters of our Ukrainian Catholic Church.

Today, so many years later, the ties of friendship with many of you and the sisters continues to grow strong, a lifelong friendship that ages with grace!

Today, we look back on those years with great fondness and warm memories. Like you, the memory and love of the many priests, sisters, and parishioners remain in our hearts. They are the past who have given life to the present in people whom we come to love and admire now... such as our Archbishop Stefan Soroka, and your Pastor, Father Demkiv.

We celebrate the tremendous blessings God has showered upon us these 75 years and we cannot help but remember the blessing you each have been in our life. Memories may fade with the passing of time, but know that historical and commemorative books will carry the story of life spent in Philadelphia at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception beyond all of our years! The story will continue to be told and others will come to listen to a time in history when the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate and the dedicated people of the Cathedral parish in Philadelphia were one in prayer and service to each other!

Know that you have our prayers and support and if it should come to pass that you need us, we will strive to be with you, if not physically, definitely with our prayerful support. I would like to close with the following words from St. Paul, "I thank my God each time I think of you, and when I pray for you, I pray with joy".

May God bless each and everyone of you.

-Sr. Michele, SSMI

