

**St. PHILIP THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC PARISH**  
**Diocese of Victoria**  
**El Campo, Texas**

**The Community**

El Campo is located at the crossroads of US Highway 59 and Texas Highway 71 in west Wharton County. Incorporated in 1905 the town now has a population of approximately 11,000. It had its beginnings in 1881 along with the development of the New York, Texas, and Mexican Railroad connecting Houston and Victoria. The significance of the site and the terminology vary according to the sources. It has been referred to as a siding and shipping point, a switching point, a station for construction gangs working on the railroad, and a camping place for the cattlemen of the area.<sup>1</sup>

The location on prairie land provided the names used by the railroad workers and the cowboys. This site was first called Prairie Switch; it was also referred to as Pearl of the Prairies. Four large ranches surrounded the location, and it served as a camp for the Mexican cowboys as they waited to ship cattle to San Antonio. These cowboys used the term “el campo” (the field).<sup>2</sup> The term eventually became the name for the developing community when a postal station was applied for in 1890.<sup>3</sup>

The rich farm land encouraged settlement. Czechs<sup>4</sup> and Germans came from Fayette and Colorado counties.<sup>5</sup> Swedes and Anglos, including Irish, came from other states.<sup>6</sup> Each ethnic group brought its own language, culture, traditions, and religion. Most of the Czechs and Irish and many of the Germans were of the Catholic faith.

**The Church: People and Buildings**

The number of Catholic families continued to grow. As a result of this growth, on August 28, 1897, Rev. J.A. Forest, Catholic Bishop of San Antonio, bought 3 ½ acres of land from George Herder, D.W. Jackson, and Elise Hillje. The cost was \$50.<sup>7</sup>

An article in *The Southern Messenger* of 1897 reflected on this development. “The Catholics, of whom there are a number in El Campo and vicinity have determined to build a splendid church and organize a regular parish here. Last week Father Heffernan of Inez spent several days in our little city visiting members of his church and taking preliminary steps toward the building of the proposed church.”<sup>8</sup>

The first Mass was celebrated by the Rev. William E. Heffernan of Inez in the spring of 1898 in the home of a Catholic family.<sup>9</sup> The homes of Joe Burger, John Holcak, and Gus Carville and the public school, which was next to the church property, were used for services.<sup>10</sup> By 1901 the small congregation consisted of twenty families, and services were held regularly once a month.<sup>11</sup> Families and individuals included Joe Burger, Ath Carville, Gus Carville, Paul Dornak, Herman Falke, F. J. Hardey, Martin Heja, John Holcak, John Krenek, John Kruppa, Ig. Kocurek, John Malek Sr., W. E. McKinnon, Adolph Mozisek, Frank Picha, Jos. J. Vasicek, George Wendel, and Louis Wychopen.<sup>12</sup>

Father Heffernan of Inez and later Father Hendricks ministered to the people in the El Campo mission. The first church was built in 1902 and was placed under the patronage of Sts. Peter and Paul.<sup>13</sup> The members of the first church building committee were John Polasek, Adolph Mozisek, Will Engbrock, Joe J. Vasicek Sr., and Gus Carville. Also signing the note were Geo. Wendel, Joe Dornak, and Joe Martinka.<sup>14</sup> Individuals donated materials, labor, and

money for specific items such as the altars, crucifix for the altar, altar cloth, and crucifix for the tower.<sup>15</sup> Funds were also solicited for the bell which was used from 1908 until the 2000 renovation. (APPENDIX G)

The church was dedicated by Bishop Forest, and Father Heffernan became the first resident pastor in 1909 removing the church from mission status.<sup>16</sup> The loan had been paid off and a new rectory had just been completed in 1909 when a storm destroyed the church and badly damaged the rectory. Father Heffernan moved back to Inez, and El Campo again became a mission. After the 1909 storm services were held in the school building and opera house once more.<sup>17</sup>

Several men of the parish straightened the rectory that had blown from its blocks. They also salvaged and preserved the church lumber. The old lumber and storm insurance of about fifteen hundred dollars aided in rebuilding the church. H. P. Carville was the builder with Father Heffernan doing much of the inside work such as painting and building the altars. Mr. R. H. Hancock and Mr. Frank Zaskoda were two members of the church committee. The second church was placed under the patronage of St. Philip the Apostle. Parish status was reestablished with the guidance of a full time priest.<sup>18</sup> The church was blessed by Bishop Shaw on July 10, 1910.<sup>19</sup>

Families grew and more settlers moved into the area.<sup>20</sup> The priests in El Campo began serving missions in the area: Inez, Louise, Fortran, Port Lavaca, Hillje, Ganado, Taiton, Pierce, Navidad, Blessing, Palacios, and Edna.<sup>21</sup> In November, 1916, these missions were divided between Edna and El Campo. Hillje, Ganado, and Taiton remained missions of El Campo.<sup>22</sup> Taiton was the last mission of St. Philip. St. John, Taiton, became an independent parish in 1970 when Msgr. Julius Petru left St. Philip to become the pastor at Taiton.<sup>23</sup>

In an April, 1929 letter to Archbishop Drossaerts, Father Victor Raska addressed the needs for a new church. The parish had grown to 300 families. He worried that some people stayed home because there was no room for everyone and stressed that a new, larger House of God would revive the Catholic faith in the community of El Campo.

In the same letter, the pastor indicated that the cost for the building would be about \$60,000. Of that amount, the parish had nearly \$20,000 and hoped for another \$10,000 from a successful cotton crop. "By beginning about July 1, the building will be under cover before the rains of November, Dec. Jan. and Feb. set in." F. B. Gaenslen, a San Antonio architect, had been in El Campo and had inspected the location. (APPENDIX D) He was to draw the plans and submit them to the Archbishop.

There was also a discussion of whether or not to include a basement in the plans. The basement would provide space for catechism classes, meetings of various societies, entertainments, socials, and suppers. Father Raska also presented reasons against a basement which was not included in the final plans. A new paved city street was being put down at that time; "...we shall have a real city street in front of our property."<sup>24</sup>

Those serving on the building committee were Father Raska, Ath Carville, Frank Cervenka Jr., F. J. Stokr, P. J. Wendel, H. R. Matzke, John Socha, Joe Mach, Ed Miller, and R. H. Hancock.<sup>25</sup> T. B. Hubbard Construction Company of Houston were the contractors with many local businesses assisting in the construction.<sup>26</sup> The church was to be built on the site of the old church so it was moved to the back of the lot.<sup>27</sup>

A variety of activities were designed to raise the funds needed as the U.S. was in the midst of the Depression. In May, 1929, the Catholic ladies planned an all-day picnic at the Red Hill Natatorium with "lots of entertainment for the kiddies." The meal consisted of baked chicken, barbecue, salads, cake, pie, and coffee.<sup>28</sup> The El Campo City Park was the scene of an all-day celebration and chicken barbecue in July, 1930. Music was furnished by the El Campo

Band, and Senator T. J. Holbrook of Galveston was the speaker.<sup>29</sup> In October, 1930, the pastor asked permission from the Archbishop to have a Columbus Day celebration for the benefit of the new church.<sup>30</sup> These endeavors helped to achieve their monetary goal.

The cornerstone was laid on December 7, 1930. A lead box was placed behind the cornerstone containing some coins and copies of the *Southern Messenger*, the *El Campo Citizen*, and the *El Campo News*. A document including the date, names of individuals from Pope Pius XI to national, state, and local officials, pastors and assistants was also enclosed. "To the Greater Honor and Glory of God, to the Praise of His Divine Son, Jesus Christ, under the patronage of St. Phillip, the Apostle, this new church is built."<sup>31</sup>

A news article of January, 1931, stated that "The new Catholic Church is progressing in spite of the bad weather. ...and the building begins to show what a really fine building it will be. The bell has been taken from the old tower and will not be heard again until it rings from the new church tower."<sup>32</sup>

The church was solemnly dedicated by Archbishop Drossaerts on June 14, 1931, and a crowd of 5,000 to 6,000 persons attended. (APPENDIX C) A barbecue dinner was served on the church grounds to the visitors and parishioners.<sup>33</sup> The donors of furnishings include descendants of many the early settlers as well as the settlers themselves who were still active supporters of the church some thirty years later. The stone pulpit donated by the Knights of Columbus was not in place until late July, 1931.<sup>34</sup>

Although the church building was completed, the day-to-day work of the parish continued. The priests ministered to the people, and the people ministered to the parish. The next major construction projects included a parish school building and a rectory. These projects began during the pastorate of Father Marcus Valenta and were completed under the pastorate of Father Julius Petru in May, 1956. The old rectory, the old church used as a parish hall, a garage, a wash house, and a scout hut were sold to make room for the new structures. The new owner of the old rectory converted it into an apartment house which was moved a few blocks from the church.<sup>35</sup>

The first major renovation to the 1931 church began in February, 1964. Air conditioning, art glass windows, a new pew arrangement, additional confessionals, and new Stations of the Cross were included in this project.<sup>36</sup> The ornamental high screen back of the altar and the communion rail were removed. (photo 10) Donations paid for many of the projects. Cleaning and weatherproofing continued to be a problem.

The late 1960's and early 1970's was a period during which the reforms of the Second Vatican Council were gradually implemented. The remodeling of the sanctuary to conform to liturgical regulations was accomplished during the pastorate of Father Albert Hubertus. A new altar of sacrifice was consecrated on October 12, 1975.<sup>37</sup> The relics sealed in the altar are those of SS. Gregorius, Orisius, and Titus.<sup>38</sup>

A new parish hall was dedicated on March 28, 1976 by Bishop Hugo Gerbermann. It contains a kitchen, cafeteria, and three classrooms as well as storage room.<sup>39</sup>

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church building was observed during the pastorate of Father James Brunner. Father Brunner wrote a history of the parish from 1898 to 1981 as part of this historic event. A celebration was held on June 14, 1981.<sup>40</sup> Most Rev. Patrick Flores, Archbishop of San Antonio was the celebrant. Former pastors Marcus Valenta, Julius Petru, Albert Hubertus, and Pastor James Brunner concelebrated.

. Growth and change continued for the parish as El Campo became part of the new Diocese of Victoria in 1982.<sup>41</sup> Property at the southwest corner of Church Street and Hoskins Broadway was bought for a parking lot in 1986.<sup>42</sup> In 1988 the parish bought the public school's Herder Field, south of the church, for athletic use by the St. Philip School.<sup>43</sup>

In 1998 the Project 2000 Campaign was launched for a major renovation and remodeling of the church in order to continue to meet the liturgical reforms of the church universal and to find answers for some of the structural problems of the building. A church building fund was established following a successful 1997 church picnic. Monthly contribution envelopes began, open meetings were held, and committees were formed. A major capital fundraising campaign began in November 1998 with a goal of \$1.75 million.

Construction began in August, 1999. The cornerstone laid in 1930 was removed. Additional items from the 2000 era were added to the original lead box and placed behind the new cornerstone. The new cornerstone is inscribed with the date of the dedication of the new chapel as well as the date of the dedication of the original building.<sup>44</sup> The old cornerstone was placed by the east entrance to the church.

The remodeled church includes copper domes, a canopy over the entrance, all-glass entrance doors, a baptistry allowing for immersion, a raised and extended altar area, a revised seating arrangement, an enlarged priest's sacristy, a music room, a handicapped restroom, new lighting, and a new sound system. (APPENDIX E)

The Sacred Heart Chapel provides a more intimate setting for daily Mass as well as a reservation tabernacle for adoration and prayer. Two reconciliation rooms are located off the hall between the church and the chapel. (APPENDIX F)

The blessing of the church and dedication of the Sacred Heart Chapel was held on October 22, 2000, by Bishop David Fellhauer of the Diocese of Victoria.

### **Organizations and Ministries**

Since the organization of the Altar Society in 1908, various other organizations as well as individuals have served the needs of the parish as a whole in addition to the needs of the organizations themselves.<sup>45</sup> Over the years as the needs changed, the organizations have also changed. In some cases a group would disband completely. In other instances the work was absorbed by another organization or by full or part time employees.

The Altar Society was formed for the care, cleaning, and decorating of the church building as well as the making and cleaning of linens used for liturgical functions. By 1931 there were eighty-seven members to carry out these duties in the new church building.<sup>46</sup> In the late 1990's many of the duties of the Altar Society became part of the function of the Environment and Art Committee as described in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. The job descriptions of a part time sacristan and full time maintenance director include some of the functions of the Altar Society.

Three organizations formed in 1923. The Knights of Columbus Council #2490 is a national organization with local councils. In 1940 the name was changed to Archbishop Drossaerts Council. The KC Fourth Degree Assembly was chartered in 1951.<sup>47</sup>

Also organizing in 1923 were the KJT Society, Sts. Peter and Paul #84, with ten members and the KJZT, Queen of the Holy Rosary #72, with sixteen members.<sup>48</sup> The societies are Texas Czech insurance groups. KJT was originally the men's society while the KJZT was the women's society. Now both sexes can be insured in either one of the groups.<sup>49</sup>

Court Our Lady Queen of Peace #1394, Catholic Daughters of the Americas, chartered in 1945 with 101 members.<sup>50</sup> For many years it has been the largest court in Texas. The current membership is 547. A junior court was organized in 1969; however, it is no longer active.

The Parish Council, now the Parish Administrative Council, was formed in 1970.<sup>51</sup> Over the years its function has evolved to meet the changing needs of a Catholic parish, being more active in some years than others.

The Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary for youth, the Legion of Mary, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society all had periods of activity in the parish. Some of their work is now carried on by one or more groups or by the parish as a whole.

By 1931 there were two parish choirs. There are now two adult choirs as well as a parish children's choir in addition to the school choirs. The music ministry is enhanced by the talents of both professional and non-professional musicians and cantors.

Lectors, cantors, altar servers, extra-ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and ushers help to meet other needs of the parish. Outreach programs include visits to shut-ins, hospital, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities by clergy and lay ministers. During the seasons of Advent and Lent, special donations are made to the local Blessing Cup which serves the needy in the community.

### **Religious Education**

Religious education began with the need to prepare individuals to receive the sacraments. Father Hendricks spent two weeks during a rainy season in 1902 to prepare Tom and Stella Wendel to make their Solemn Communion in the first church<sup>52</sup>. For many years the priests taught the classes; later lay teachers assisted in this ministry. During the year of 1942-43, catechism for grades 1-3 and Junior Bible History classes met on Sunday.<sup>53</sup> There was also a Junior Bible History class on Saturday. For one or two weeks during the summers of the 1940's nuns, seminarians, and lay teachers taught religion classes to the children. Discussion clubs were formed for the adults.

Later the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) provided materials for teaching students in grades 1-12. Classes for school age students continue at the present time under the Catholic Christian Education (CCE) format. A Youth Formation Coordinator oversees this program. At the appropriate level the children are prepared for first penance, first Eucharist, and confirmation in these classes.

Adult religious study takes a variety of forms at the local and diocesan level. For those adults wishing to join the Catholic Church, the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is conducted by a team of lay persons headed by a deacon.

### **St. Philip Catholic School**

The dream of having a Catholic school in the community was realized during the pastorate of Father Marcus A. Valenta who came to El Campo in 1946. By the summer of 1948, architectural plans for a school were developed; they were presented to the Archdiocesan Building Board in San Antonio in 1949.<sup>54</sup> Father Valenta, along with Mr. R. H. Hancock, and his daughter Mrs. Dan Gillean, a graduate of Our Lady of the Lake College, approached the Congregation of Divine Providence for nuns to staff the school.

Sister M. Silverius and Sister M. Evangelista joined Mrs. Jerome Sliva to staff the school for the 1949-50 school year.<sup>55</sup> A parishioner provided funds for the purchase of the Wendel home across the street from the church.<sup>56</sup> This house served as the convent for the nuns. There was a shortage of building materials at that time. As a result, classes for the first year were held in the parish hall, the former 1910 structure. The enrollment for the first year was 117.<sup>57</sup> By August 1950 the faculty had increased to five teachers with the addition of two more lay teachers.<sup>58</sup> Construction of the school was sufficiently completed by the fall of 1950 so that classes could begin in the new building.

Enrollment increased and the facility and faculty increased, as well. The first eighth grade class graduated in 1955 with forty-three students.<sup>59</sup> The first class to complete all eight

grades at St. Philip graduated in 1957 with forty-four students.<sup>60</sup> By 1960 there were seven nuns including a music teacher; four rooms were added to the convent.<sup>61</sup> The school facility was enlarged in 1958 and again in 1963.

By 1978 the Congregation of Divine Providence could not longer supply the school principal.<sup>62</sup> The first lay principal was employed at that time with a few nuns remaining on the teaching staff. At the present time the staff consists entirely of lay teachers. The former convent is used for high school CCE classes, for RCIA meetings, and for other group meetings.

Various organizations have supported the school and its activities and needs in different ways. A Mothers Club was formed in 1950; it evolved into the St. Philip Parent Teacher Club in 1956. A booster club was organized in 1981 to promote and financially support the athletic programs. The School Advisory Council has replaced the school board which was established in 1969. Its functions include formulating school policy, budgeting, serving as an advisory council to the pastor and principal, and supervising the maintenance and new construction of the school. The St. Philip School Maintenance Committee formed in 1995 helps to provide funds for major projects through fund-raising activities. These funds have provided a new computer lab, new bus, and additional air conditioning.

The St. Philip School Endowment Fund was established in 1978.<sup>63</sup> Contributions to this trust fund come in various forms: memorials, in honor of an individual, and through an annual Read-a-thon. The interest earned each year is used as needed to meet various expenses. As a result of a successful Read-a-thon in 2005, the Endowment Fund now surpasses the 1\$ million mark. A board of trustees administers the fund.

At the time of the school's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1999, there were sixteen classrooms, a science lab, a computer lab, library, gymnasium, cafeteria, lounge, and three offices. Enrichment courses included Spanish, music, and band. An extended-day program provided care for students who needed to remain beyond the normal school hours. The staff consisted of the principal, nineteen teachers, and a support personnel of thirteen. Enrollment for kindergarten through eighth grade was 213.<sup>64</sup>

At the present time the staff numbers twenty-seven which includes support staff, maintenance, cafeteria, and custodial. Pre-kindergarten for three and four year-olds was added for the 2004-05 year. Enrollment is 204 for grades 3/k-8. Special courses include Algebra I, applied music, choir, band, drama, and Spanish. The school is fully accredited by the Accreditation Commission of the Texas Catholic Conference in collaboration with the Texas Education Agency.<sup>65</sup>

### **Sacramental Records**

Sacramental records are vital in the life and work of a parish. One must be baptized in order to receive the next sacraments: reconciliation (penance), Eucharist, confirmation, marriage, and holy orders. If a person moves from one parish to another, the record from the previous parish provides verification of a required sacrament. Until the 1960's most records were written in Latin.

The baptism records for St. Philip parish begin with Henry Elson Burger, son of Joseph Burger and Anna Lutringer. He was born on 25 May 1898 and baptized on 14 June 1898. Also listed in the record are the godparents, the minister, space for the confirmation record, and space for a marriage record.<sup>66</sup>

First Communion records begin with the class of September 17, 1911. Bishop Forest confirmed a class of forty-eight on June 3, 1903.

The first marriage record is that of W. J. Hefner and Jennie Krost. They married on 4 May 1899.<sup>67</sup> The witnesses and the minister are also listed. This record is written on a lined page. A later marriage register has printed headings for columns listing contracting parties, residence, parents, date of marriage, witnesses, priest, date and place of baptism, and banns/dispensations/remarks. For many years the banns were read on three Sundays preceding the wedding.

Without a resident priest and because of the necessity of burying the deceased within a very short period of time, one assumes that the early burials were conducted by family members, friends, or other ministers. There was no time to send a message to Inez, a distance of approximately forty miles, and hope for the priest to arrive quickly by horse and buggy on dirt roads. A few early burial records are scattered in some of the other parish registers. On February 27, 1904, Father Hendricks buried Mrs. Ferd. Teichman in the Catholic cemetery in Hillje.<sup>68</sup>

The first St. Philip burial register found begins in 1912 with the burial of Carl Bacak, age 21, of Hillje. He died 16 October 1912 and was buried on 18 October 1912.<sup>69</sup> He was buried in Hillje. Other columns provide the name of minister, the cause of death, and a place for notations such as “baptized by a lay person” or “suddenly overcome in the field while fighting prairie fire.”

### **Holy Cross Memorial Park**

The first El Campo burial found in the record books was Fred Levandosky, age 4, on January 7, 1913.<sup>70</sup> El Campo City Cemetery is listed as the place of burial; however, that term was used for ODHS burials. One burial, that of Henry *Ilse* Burger, son of Joseph B. and Anna Lutringer Burger, was located in the records of the Swedish Lutheran cemetery.<sup>71</sup> Henry *Elson* Burger, the first recorded baptism on June 14, 1898, was born on May 25, 1898, and died July 7, 1898.

Five acres of land south of El Campo was purchased from L.H. and Julia Lynner on February 2, 1929; the land was designated for a cemetery.<sup>72</sup> Prior to that time most burials were in the ODHS (*Orden der Hermann Söhne*) Garden of Memories. The ODHS cemetery was opened in 1901 by the Sons of Herman; it was later available to the public<sup>73</sup>. Others burials of St. Philip parishioners or by the St. Philip priest were in the Hillje, Taiton, or Lakeview cemeteries, also located in Wharton County.

Agnes Sugarek Kaluza was the first person buried in Holy Cross Memorial Park on November 15, 1929.<sup>74</sup> The crucifix in Holy Cross Memorial Park was donated by Barbara Chovanec in 1943.<sup>75</sup>

The cemetery property expanded in 1947 when ten acres of adjoining property was transferred to St. Philip Catholic Church by Clarence Lynner, et al.<sup>76</sup> However, in 1964 the Texas Highway Department bought over three acres of the second tract of land for a right of way for US Highway 59. This sale left about five and one-half acres on the west of Highway 59 and about one and one-half acres on the east side of the highway.<sup>77</sup>

A cemetery committee was formed in 1970 to handle the care and business of the cemetery.<sup>78</sup> For a number of years, the membership of the committee included representatives from St. Robert Catholic Church. Business concerns include updating of all grave sites, establishing a uniform price schedule, and instituting an endowment fund. A major cleanup of the cemetery included purchase of maintenance equipment and construction of a storage shed.

Holy Cross Memorial Park bought a one-acre section from the City of El Campo on June 8, 1978, and from the County of Wharton on March 3, 1979.<sup>79</sup> This section was originally

thought to belong to St. Robert Church in El Campo, a predominately Hispanic parish, since the section contains Mexican graves. It is now part of the Holy Cross Memorial Park.

The land east of the highway was sold in 1978.<sup>80</sup> Mausoleums were added in 1971 and 1980.<sup>81</sup> A full time employee is in charge of maintenance for the cemetery. An evening Mass is held at the cemetery on All Souls Day, November 2, weather permitting. Family members come from other areas to bless the graves and pray for their deceased relatives and friends.

### **Parish Administration**

As Msgr. Brunner discovered when he wrote the 1981 history of the parish, the day-to-day business of a parish is seldom documented. He indicates that there were no printed bulletins in the early years, and announcements were written on a chalkboard. The parish files do contain one small book, 1940-1944, in which the priest wrote the announcements to be read at the Sunday Masses. Topics included the times for various meetings, catechism and Bible history classes, Benediction, Way of the Cross, funerals, and confessions. Marriage banns were also listed for first, second, or third reading. The reading of the banns gave anyone who knew of any impediment to the marriage to make that fact known. Parishioners was reminded of their church obligations during various seasons such as Easter time. They were also reminded of their civic responsibilities such as the paying of their poll taxes so that they could vote.

The documented activities are usually those which take the greatest amount of planning, time, and money – often the construction projects. They are the ones that culminate in some kind of celebration with booklets and programs. Since Catholic parishes are not autonomous, many documents reflect the nature of the universal church: the local parish's connection to the bishop (or Archbishop) as head of the diocese (or Archdiocese).

All matters involving finance and construction must be reviewed and approved by the bishop or his appointed representatives. All properties are in the name of the bishop and his successors in office. The pastor, who is under the authority of the bishop, sends timely reports on various matters to the diocese as required or requested.<sup>82</sup> Reports and correspondence in the files of the San Antonio Archdiocesan archives cover a range of topics from financial concerns of various kinds and conditions of buildings to letters from parishioners and a request for reinterment in the Catholic cemetery.

One knows that the priest says Mass – whether Sunday, holyday, daily, funeral, or wedding -- hears confessions, conducts marriage preparation, baptizes, counsels those in need, attends meetings at all levels, visits the sick, writes sermons, makes reports, and occasionally takes a vacation. A deacon can assume some of the duties, but he cannot say Mass or hear confessions. Someone cleans the house and cooks; someone counts the collection money and makes deposits, answers the phone, keeps records, prepares bulletins, takes care of mailings, and cleans the church. The same person may be responsible for several of these jobs.

Currently St. Philip the Apostle Parish has one priest and two ordained deacons. The parish office in the rectory building has a financial secretary and a receptionist whose job descriptions contain a variety of responsibilities. There is one person who serves as housekeeper and cook. She also has other duties and fills in where needed. A full-time maintenance supervisor and a part-time sacristy coordinator have a wide range of duties as well. The cemetery supervisor helps the maintenance supervisor with some projects. Volunteers assist with special mailings at church picnic time and at Christmas time and in a variety of other ways that are not associated with a specific ministry.

Very few people would think of stopping his or her routine work to establish a document for future reference. Thus, the records that are available are the result of work for which there are no records – work that often goes unrecognized.

### Continuity

The current pastor, Rev. Gary Janak, was born in El Campo although his family moved from the area when he was a young child. He was baptized in St. Philip Church by Msgr. Julius Petru. His great uncle, Rev. Roman Janak, was an assistant at St. Philip from 1946-1948. Father Roman was killed in an accident in the same year that Father Gary was born. Father Gary came to El Campo on July 1, the anniversary of Father Roman's death.

Deacon Jarrel Nohavitza is the great grandson of William and Barbara Braden Engbrock who were early members of the parish. William Engbrock was a member of the first church committee and signed the note for the 1902 building. Barbara Engbrock was very active in the Altar Society. Deacon Nohavitza's grandparents, Adolph and Emma Engbrock Wendel, were also active in the parish. Deacon's parents, John and Katherine Wendel Nohavitza, were one of three couples married at the same Mass on October 21, 1924.<sup>83</sup>

At the present time the parish census contains 1050 families or households . The parish family of 3,000 or more includes descendants of several of the early families. These descendants carry on the tradition of their ancestors and continue to be active members of the parish. The buildings, the number of priests, the times and numbers of Masses, the names of the organizations, and the needs of the parish may have changed. Some of these changes were very difficult ones. Some difficulties may have been the result of ethnic differences or conflicts between leadership – whether clerical, religious, or lay -- and the people.<sup>84</sup>

However, for over 100 years the St. Philip the Apostle Parish has continued to meet the challenges of a parish community. As Father Raska wrote in a letter to the Archbishop, *Deo volente*, "God willing."<sup>85</sup> The pastor used this term in reference to "good prospects for a fine crop." Perhaps that phrase can also apply to a "fine crop" of parishioners. Since a parish consists of imperfect individuals striving for holiness in an imperfect world, it must depend on the willingness of God to meet the challenges of change and growth.

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the church building on June 14, 2006, provides another opportunity to reaffirm a belief in God by the Catholic community of St. Philip the Apostle in El Campo, Texas.

Compiled by Arliss Treybig, 2005

<sup>1</sup> J.O. Graham, ed., *The Book of Wharton County* (Rich, 1926), 149; Walter Prescott Webb, ed., *The Handbook of Texas*, Volume I (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1952), 550; Annie Lee Williams, *A History of Wharton County, 1846-1961* (Austin: Von Boeckman-Jones, 1964), 246. The book that Graham, county agent, compiled appears to be the oldest county history book written. The section on El Campo was written by the 1926 American History class of El Campo High School. Unfortunately, it is not documented. That history refers to the site of El Campo as section 230. The county map identifies it as J.B. Morford, Abstract 523. The 1926 history gives 1882 as the earliest date for El Campo. The other two sources list 1881. The 1926 history uses the term Pearl of the Prairies. Current use of the term for promotional materials is Pearl of the Prairie.

<sup>2</sup> The Spanish dictionary gives “field” as the first choice. The term “*el campo*” is used for “camp” when it refers to a military camp.

<sup>3</sup> *Wharton County Pictorial History., Volume I, 1846-1946 Our First 100 Years* (Austin: Eakin, 1993), 110.

<sup>4</sup> *Czech Texans*, The University of Texas Cultures ethnic series (San Antonio, 1972), 1; *Czech Voices*, trans. Clinton Machann and James W. Mendl (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), xv; Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Random House, 1993). The term “Czech” refers to those Slavic people who emigrated from the historic provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia as well as Czech speaking Silesia. For much of their history, these people had been ruled by a foreign power. From 1620-1918 they were ruled by Austria which resulted in friction between Czechs and German speaking people. The term “Bohemian” is used in some references.

<sup>5</sup> *High Hill Centennial History: Commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Mary’s Parish, 1860-1960* (Schulenburg: Schulenburg Sticker, 1960), 91-92; Rev. Paul Kaspar, trans. Rev. V.a. Svrcek, *A History of the Czech-Moravian Catholic Communities of Texas* (Waco: Library Binding, 1974), 60-61; Rev. Victor A. Raska, ed., *Dedication Souvenir of the Church of St. Philip, the Apostle* (El Campo, 1931), 11; personal knowledge of compiler. Nita Carville wrote the history of the Catholic Church in El Campo, Texas, for the dedication souvenir booklet. Her history is the first one written, and most later records use her information.

<sup>6</sup> Annie Lee Williams, 247.

<sup>7</sup> Wharton County Deed Record, Volume Y, page 485; Wharton County Deed Record, Volume 91, page 151; Raska, 11; *High Hill Centennial History*, 91, 93. The High Hill history indicates that Herder, Jackson, and Hillje and others were part of the Weimar Land Company that bought 26, 000 acres of land composing what is now El Campo. The original deed included the phrase, “Less one acre in S W Corner heretofore conveyed to the Public School Trustees.” A correction deed dated September 16, 1930, stated “And whereas in truth and in fact said one acre had never been conveyed to the school trustees nor to any other person, firm or corporation.” The correction deed validated the title to the entire 3 ½ acres. Joe Burger and Gus Carville were instrumental in negotiating the purchase of the property.

<sup>8</sup> “50 Years Ago,” *El Campo Leader-News*, September 13, 1980, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Raska, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Raska, 11.

<sup>11</sup> El Campo News...Souvenir Edition, December 31, 1901, no page number.

<sup>12</sup> Raska, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Raska, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Raska, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Raska, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Raska, 11, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Raska, 15, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Raska, 17. No record has been found to indicate why the name was changed.

<sup>19</sup> Raska, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Among settlers of other ethnic origins, some Czech immigrants came directly to the area after their arrival in the US.

<sup>21</sup> Kaspar, 60-911 Raska, 19; James C. Brunner, compiler, *A History of St. Philip the Apostle Parish*, El Campo, Texas 1898-1981 (El Campo: Quick Copy, 1981), 16; Rev. M.J. Gilbert, compiler and editor, *Diamond Jubilee 1874-1949 Archdiocese of San Antonio* (San Antonio: Schneider, 1949), 154; Rev. Marcus Valenta, "St Philip's Erected First Church in 1902", no date, no page. The church in Pierce was predominately Mexican; it later moved to El Campo and developed into the St. Robert Bellarmine Parish. Citrus Grove (4 miles northeast of Collegeport in southwestern Matagorda County) was included in some lists. According to the *New Handbook of Texas*, Citrus Grove, Navidad (10 miles west of Edna), and Fordtran (20 miles north of Victoria) were small, thriving communities in the early 1900's. Only a small number of people live in those areas now.

<sup>22</sup> Brunner, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Brunner, 49; Decree establishing Taiton as a parish, 12 February 1970, St. Philip Parish files.

<sup>24</sup> George Herder, D.W. Jackson and Elise Hillje to Rev. J.A. Forest, Catholic Bishop of San Antonio, Volume Y, page 485, Wharton County Deed Record; George Herder, D.W. Jackson, & Mrs. Elise Hillje to Trustees of the El Campo Independent School District, Volume V. page 631, Wharton County Deed Record; Cindy Cerny, city secretary, to Arliss Treybig, February 8, 2005. Both deeds were signed on the same date, August 28, 1897. Both refer to the street at the south of the property (front of the church building) as Church Street. Evidently the name was established prior to signing of deeds. The city council minutes in 1907 use the Church Street designation.

<sup>25</sup> Raska, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Raska, 25.

<sup>27</sup> "50 Years Ago," *El Campo Leader-News*, August 9, 1980, 6.

<sup>28</sup> "50 Years Ago," *El Campo Leader-News*, May 5, 1970, no page number.

<sup>29</sup> "50 Years Ago," *El Campo Leader-News*, July 12, 1980, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Victor A. Raska to Most Rev. A. J. Drossaerts, DD, October 2, 1930.

<sup>31</sup> Raska, 23; Chuck Schwartzkopf, "St. Philip reveals cornerstone of faith," *El Campo Leader-News*, 27 September 2000.

<sup>32</sup> "50 Years Ago," *El Campo Leader-News*, January 17, 1981, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Brunner, 25.

<sup>34</sup> A typed note in the parish files references an article in the *El Campo News*, July 31, 1931. The pulpit was attached to the wall next to the Blessed Virgin Mary's altar, west of the main altar. It was raised a distance from the floor and was reached by a short flight of steps. It was enclosed except for the entrance area. The pulpit was removed during the 1964 remodeling.

<sup>35</sup> Brunner, 29; The rectory served as an apartment building until about 2002. At that time it was again converted – back to a one-family residence – when it was sold to a parish family. The son of the individual who had bought the rectory was the owner at the time of the sale.

<sup>36</sup> Brunner, 47; The four art glass windows on the east side represent the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The designs incorporate symbols associated with each one; e.g., money bags for tax collector Matthew. The four windows on the west side represent four

ethnic groups who were instrumental in the establishing of the parish: Czech, German, Irish, and French. (The French are not mentioned in early history; however, a fourth window required one group in addition to the three most often listed.) Again symbols associated with the patron saint(s) of the country were used: e.g., a stylized shamrock for St. Patrick. (The writer of this history recalls that a news article appeared at the time the windows were installed. However, thus far the article has not been found to verify the existence of the article and the specific saint and symbol. The writer believes the other saints to be Sts. Cyril and Methodius-Czech; St. Boniface-German; and St. Louis-French.) A large window behind the choir loft and facing the street depicts St. Philip.

<sup>37</sup> Raska, 12, 23; Brunner, 54. The changes that occurred following the Second Vatican Council included the altar's being placed so that the priest could face the people. The original altar in St. Philip church could not be removed without its being demolished. Instead a platform was built, and a new altar was placed on it. (photo 10) Marie Hefner Appling (Mrs. F.E.) donated the altar in memory of her mother, Mrs. W. J. Hefner. Mrs. Hefner had donated the altar for the 1931 building and had furnished the lumber for the altar in the first church building. Bro. Edward Loch, S.M., San Antonio Archdiocese Archivist, searched the records for the name of the saint whose relics are in the 1931 altar. According to those records the saint is St. Severian, martyr.

<sup>38</sup> Brunner, 54.

<sup>39</sup> Brunner, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Printed program of the celebration, parish files.

<sup>41</sup> "Diocese Information," Diocese of Victoria, <<http://www.victoriadiocese.org/infor/diocese.htm>>

<sup>42</sup> Warranty Deed #721 342, December 20, 1986, Shackelford to Most Rev. Charles Grahmann, Bishop of Victoria.

<sup>43</sup> Warranty Deed #782 150, August 9, 1988, El Campo Independent School District to Most Rev. Charles Grahmann, Bishop of Victoria.

<sup>44</sup> Schwartzkopf, "St. Philip reveals cornerstone of faith," 9-B, 14-B; Chuck Schwartzkopf, "Parishioners gather for dedication service." *El Campo Leader-News*, October 25, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Raska, 15, 21; Brunner, 76.

<sup>46</sup> Raska, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Brunner, 100-101.

<sup>48</sup> Brunner, 86-87.

<sup>49</sup> Kaspar, viii; Jeraldine Socha, KJZT member, to Arliss Treybig, February 2, 2000. KJT – Katolicka Jednota Texaska (Czech Catholic Union of Texas).

<sup>50</sup> Brunner, 78.

<sup>51</sup> Brunner, 105.

<sup>52</sup> Raska, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Announcements Booklet, St. Philip Parish files.

<sup>54</sup> Brunner, 30; *Memoirs: A Centennial Project*, (Sisters of Divine Providence, 1966), 84.

<sup>55</sup> Brunner, 31; *Memoirs: A Centennial Project*, 84.

<sup>56</sup> Brunner, 30. According to the Engbrock genealogy, Adolph and Emma Engbrock Wendel moved to El Campo in 1928 after Adolph retired from farming. They built their new home near St. Philip's Church which they attended. Adolph died in 1936; Emma maintained the home until her death in 1942. Son Peter J. Wendel bought the house and later sold it to Mrs. Strauss according to Mr. Wendel's daughter Rosalie Wendel Bourque. The Strauss family lived there for several years. (the writer's recollection)

57 *Memoirs: A Centennial Project*, 84.

58 *Memoirs: A Centennial Project*, 84.

59 Brunner, 41; “Pioneering Spirit marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Philip School,” *The Catholic Lighthouse*, Diocese of Victoria, Texas, August, 1999.

60 Brunner, 43; “Pioneering Spirit marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Philip School.”

61 Brunner, 46.

62 Brunner, 62; “Pioneering Spirit marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Philip School.”

63 Brunner, 61.

64 “Pioneering Spirit marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Philip School.”

65 Tish McAlister, St. Philip School principal, to Arliss Treybig, February 8, 2005.

66 Baptismal Register, 1898.

67 Marriage Register, 1899.

68 Parish Register. There is a possibility that some burials are included in the Inez parish registers.

69 Burial Register, 1912.

70 Burial Register, 1913.

71 Wharton County Historical Commission, Wharton County Cemetery Survey, Swedish Lutheran Cemetery. According to a family history, *Our Swedish Line*, by Peggy Blackmore Tombs, June 1980, there was a small cemetery across from the church in what is now St. Philip School’s Pioneer Field. (Earlier it was Herder Field, the public school’s first football field and later playground.) In approximately 1910 the bodies were moved to ODHS cemetery or the Swedish Lutheran cemetery. The body of the Burger baby may have been one of those early burials that was later moved to the Swedish cemetery. The earliest death date found in the Swedish cemetery is 1891. A notation on Photo 1 also refers to this cemetery.

72 Brunner, 83; deed abstract in parish files.

73 Wharton County Historical Commission.

74 Brunner, 85.

75 Brunner, 83, 85.

76 Brunner, 83.

77 Brunner, 83.

78 Brunner, 83

79 Brunner, 83-84.

80 Brunner, 84.

81 Brunner, 83-84.

82 Rev. Marcus A. Valenta to Most Rev. Robert E. Lucey, Archbishop of San Antonio, December 4, 1949. The pastor informed the Archbishop that he had blessed the tabernacle of the church as recommended by the Archbishop. There was no record in the parish archives that it had been blessed. In a report to the Archbishop in 1942, Father Raska wrote that the rectory had been built around 1908 for approximately \$1,500. A porch was added later and still later some space upstairs was made into a bathroom.

83 Brunner, 111 (photo); Marriage Register, 1924.

84 The first Czech and German settlers in El Campo had been in the US for one or two generations. Others who came in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century still retained the language of their native land and some prejudices against those who had been their oppressors. As a result, there were some conflicts. In 1913 a petition was sent to the bishop requesting a “Bohemian” priest. The petition is included in the St. Philip Parish files in the Archdiocese of San Antonio archives. The announcements booklet of the early 1940’s includes references to a Czech sermon

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at the 10:00 Mass and the Way of the Cross in Czech in order to accommodate those persons still reading and speaking the Czech language.

<sup>85</sup> Letter, April 20, 1929.