Our Lady of Lourdes Church

The Faces of God: Our Lady of Lourdes Church

**By Hermine Lees**

**STORY & PHOTOS BY SISTER NANCY RUUMO, C.J.S.**

The renovated Our Lady of Lourdes Church was rededicated in 1880 after the 1984 Northridge earthquake.

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**Established:** September 1, 1958

**Location:** 18450 Superior Street, Northridge

**San Fernando Region:** Diocese 5

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In early 2011, before it was announced who would succeed Msgr. Peter Moran as the leader of Our Lady of Lourdes church, the longtime pastor asked parishioners to pray for their new shepherd.

As a welcoming community, they responded with kindness and generosity. And when Father David Loftus was named administrator, the parish’s kind group members, who pray while they sew and knit, presented the County Mayors with a set blanket with a Celtic cross.

But in so many ways, this Wood Valley parish reaches out whenever and wherever there is a need. This sense of spirituality, its core, is very alive here,” says Father Loftus, now midway through his fifth year as pastor. He is the principal celebrant was Cardinal Manning. The parish hall opened in 1986 is named for Msgr. Stroup.

During his 25 years in Northridge, he completed the entire church, including the adjoining rectory. Father Loftus — like Msgr. Moran before him — is very alive here,” says Father Loftus, now midway through his fifth year as pastor. He is the principal celebrant was Cardinal Manning. The parish hall opened in 1986 is named for Msgr. Stroup.

During his 25 years in Northridge, he completed the entire church, including the adjoining rectory. Father Loftus — like Msgr. Moran before him — is famous in Rancho San Antonio in Chatsworth for 725 families.

Our Lady of Lourdes Church has been named after the site in France where the Blessed Virgin Mary first appeared to the little peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous. The apparitions began on January 6, 1858, in the town of Lourdes, where an underground stream of healing water was discovered. Bernadette saw the Virgin Mary for the first time on January 25, 1858.

The first vision was simply a white figure surrounded by a halo. Bernadette later added that the figure was wearing a white dress and a blue mantle. Bernadette first saw the Virgin Mary in the grotto of Massabielle, where there was a spring of fresh water. The Virgin Mary told Bernadette to ignore the people who were saying that she was deceiving herself.

Bernadette's visions continued until July 16 of the year until church authorities verified her authenticity and devotion to the site increased. Since then, 52 miracles have been medically verified and Lourdes water continues to flow. The shrine is one of the most visited sites in the world. The last day for Our Lady of Lourdes was Feb. 11.

The Northridge parish — located just east of Reseda Boulevard — began Sept. 1, 1958. A few blocks from the campus of newly-opened San Fernando Valley State College (known today as Cal State University, Northridge). It was one of two parishes founded that year under Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, four of their titles for the Catholic Church. Our Lady of Lourdes parish was founded Oct. 12 in the grotto of Rancho San Antonio in Chatsworth for 725 families.

The following year the Carmelite Sisters opened the new school, and in 1960 Cardinal McIntyre blessed the new church for 1,500 families. In the next ten years the rectory was completed, a new convent built and multiple parish groups formed.

At the helm was the founding pastor, Father Peter Stroup, who had just finished two years as the founding pastor of Guardian Angel Church in Pacoima. Ordained in 1942 (when the archdiocese at its first Mass was a young Father Timothy Manning). Father Stroup served at St. Vibiana Cathedral as master of ceremonies and was also the first director of Our Lady Chapel Catholic Information Center. During his 25 years in Northridge, he completed the entire parish plant, paid off the debt that was paid by 1974, and inaugurated its outstanding liturgical music program. He also oversaw the parish through the first of two major earthquakes, the 6.6 Sylmar quake of Feb. 9, 1971, from which the parish sustained no major damage.

Honored by Pope Paul VI as a domestic prelate (monsignor) in 1967, Msgr. Stroup died in June 1983 at age 66; the principal celebrant was Cardinal Manning. The parish hall opened in 1986 is named for Msgr. Stroup.

By the time Our Lady of Lourdes celebrated its silver jubilee in October 1983, a new pastor was in place: Father Michael Moran, a native of County Galway, Ireland, the youngest of 14 children (two of whom were also priests, Msgr. Michael Moran, pastor of St. Mary, Palmdale, and Father Francis Moran, who served in Santa Ana). Father Peter, ordained in 1965, served five parishes before beginning his pastorate at Our Lady of Lourdes, whose faith community continued to grow. In 1992 the pastor was named a prelate of his holiness (monsignor) as plans to remodel the church were in progress.

Three plans took on new shape, and urgency, after Jan. 17, 1994, when the 6.7 Northridge quake struck, resulting in 20 deaths and 1,500 injured. Msgr. Moran and the parish community were strong enough the first time to offer help and general comfort.

Eventually, the renovation efforts resumed and in July 1995 the Our Lady of Lourdes community celebrated the finished product. “It has been a team effort,” Msgr. Moran noted, “and with God’s help we will continue to walk as a team, and strengthen our spiritual bonds.”

The current administrator of this 2,500-family parish, Father David Loftus, is a native of County Meath, Ireland, ordained in 1994. He has a master’s degree in theology from Boston College and holds the third degree in education for the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education. At the upcoming Religious Education Congress in February, his workshop, “Walks the Way: Enter the Mystery,” will center on the teaching of God’s providence on the pilgrimage of our own lives—a topic that St. Bernadette Soubirous would certainly understand.