



Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish Archive Needs Your Help

In January 2012 the Parish of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel announced a historical event: the formation of a long overdue parish archive. The mission in creating a parish archive was fourfold:

- 1) To locate whatever available documents and memorabilia was left by previous generations, with the hope of uncovering outright treasures from the past, or usable data to build upon.**
- 2) To evaluate, catalogue, and preserve all that is donated by individual parishioners, by the various parish societies and organizations, by the public, and by former parishioners that have moved out of town.**
- 3) To facilitate and encourage the documentation of significant parish events of the present, for many of the records created and maintained today will become our historical collective memory of tomorrow.**
- 4) To eventually create a permanent historical exhibit for all to enjoy.**

Due to the fact that there existed no assigned and secure space to serve as a depository to encourage the preservation of material documenting the development of our parish, very little remains for us of its early years. Most likely, after the owners of the treasured documents

departed, the bulk of their material was discarded by those that survived them. Let us act today, and keep this unfortunate scenario from taking place tomorrow.

The success of our archive depends on how much interest, assistance, suggestions and material our parishioners are able to provide. And while your participation is critical to the new archive by donating material that you own, and in seeking material from people that you know, it does not require a lot of your time, nor does it require long-term involvement. Convince others that now, for the first time, we can assure everyone that what they donate to the parish archive will be as safe as it has been in their own home, and will remain so for generations to come. This is a time of commitment for all of us to record the history of our parish going back to the arrival of the revered Our Lady of Mount Carmel statue in 1894, the erection of a wooden chapel at 908-910 N. 24th Avenue in 1895, followed by its designation as the official parish church of Melrose Park in May 1903.

Postponing doing something usually results in its demise; therefore you need to react promptly. You need to consider the historical value of this initiative and participate with dedication and determination. How can you help? Examine those forgotten cardboard boxes residing in closets, basements and attics for any type of memorabilia, correspondence, printed material, newspaper articles, old church bulletins, photos, slides, film, videos, old certificates, flyers of past events, etc. Also, seek relevant information such as the names and dates of members of the various parish societies and organizations, the names of our pastors and clergy, and the names of the nuns and priests who actually were born in Melrose Park and graduated from our grammar school. And most importantly, information relating to the genealogy of our predecessors who played a pivotal historical and religious role in the history of our parish, such as relatives and families of the foundress of our church, Emanuela De Stefano; this would be invaluable.

To help, you need to put down on paper what you yourself remember and what you have heard from your parents and older relatives, for in doing so you will honor their memory. Another way of seriously committing to help would be to contact your friends and relatives, including those that have moved out of town, and who might still be coming back to participate in our yearly Feast. Tell them about our new archive, give them this article and ask them if they have anything to donate, such as pictures that captured events in our 1908 church, such as feasts and weddings or items salvaged when the church itself was demolished in 1966. Perhaps you can convince them to put in writing details or simple personal stories, recalling what they remember or heard of the early Feasts, our nuns, priests and pastors, our churches, rural Melrose Park or what they recall hearing from their parents and older relatives. Recording verbal information from those older than you might open new windows into forgotten areas. If so requested, the archive can make copies of material that people entrust to us and we can then return the originals to the owner; please do not write on the originals, rather make all notations on a separate piece of paper.

Handwritten contributions need not be in some elegant format, nor do they have to read like a novel; they simply need to be informative and legible.

Your story could relate to something quaint or something important. It could describe segments of your personal story growing up and maturing in Melrose Park or recall the early years of our parish that you heard from your grandparents. But this is a task that cannot be done effectively in one sitting.

For those managing and sustaining the archive, their involvement and work has no end. You can help them by looking for dormant material, but also by providing information obtained through actual personal research, by

interacting with others that you know and by offering relevant suggestions and information. They are counting on you.

This archive initiative is not a one- or two-person effort. It requires the cooperation and help of others, especially older parishioners who might be able to provide material and information essential in writing our unique story – a story born out of strong ethnic traditions and profound devotion to La Madonna del Carmine, which has remained undiminished for the past 120 years. The driving force for all of us is the unwavering devotion to the Mother of God, a personal tribute to our immigrant ancestors and a desire to lay out a path for the next generation to follow.

The archive is managed by our parishioner, Victor Nicodemo. You can reach Victor at (708) 681-3818. Also, you can mail or hand-deliver documents to the parish rectory in a manila envelope identified as "OLMC Archive;" please include your name, address and phone number. We thank you for any help that you can provide.