

The History of Our Lady of Fatima

On September 23, 1962, a dream becomes a reality. It takes us back to the year 1948 when a census was taken to see if something could be done to bring a priest here to administer the sacraments and be the spiritual guide to the Portuguese people. In 1949 St. Augustine Cathedral and St. Mary parishes had a priest from Fairfield Prep come so that the Portuguese people make their Easter Duty. But this was not enough nor adequate. Some of our Portuguese people would go to Rhode Island or Massachusetts to make their Easter Duty. In 1953, Bridgeport became a diocese. And in June 1955 an audience was held with the Most Reverend Bishop Shehan to discuss the needs of obtaining a Portuguese priest for our people. His Excellency said at that time he was thinking about it but also stated it had been a number of years since a Portuguese priest was ordained in the United States. He would have to send for a priest from Portugal and would, therefore, write to the Holy See to determine what could be done.

With God's help, Reverend Constantino R. Caldas arrived in Boston on April 6, 1956. The Most Reverend Bishop Shehan announced to the people in the Cathedral that a Portuguese priest was here to administer to the Portuguese people. The late Msgr. Murphy, who at the time was the Rector of the Cathedral, arranged to have Father Caldas meet with some of the Portuguese parishioners and on April 13, 1956 a meeting was held in the Cathedral Chapel. About 100 people were in attendance. The following Sunday mass was offered. Attendance was small in the beginning, but over time, it became necessary to have two masses offered in Portuguese. We will always be grateful that Fr. Caldas was sent to us.

On May 27, 1956 a dinner welcoming Father Caldas was held at Nu Champs By The Sea restaurant attended by 400 people. A very special blessing to the Father and all Portuguese people came from our Holy Father, Pius the XII.

The Holy Name Society was the first establish Society and following it, Our Lady of Fatima Society for the ladies of the parish. There was a communion class of three children for the very first Holy Communion. In October 1956 Bishop Shehan blessed the statue of Our Lady of Fatima that came from Portugal. From that day on, the attendance to Sunday masses, the number of confessions, children attending Communion and Confirmation classes greatly increased.

Every October, we had a special celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima. October 1957 we had an outdoor procession on the Cathedral grounds with children dressed as angels. On a Saturday evening in October, 1958, we held the 1st candlelight procession. This brought a little bit of the Portuguese traditions to the city of Bridgeport. Soon the chapel was too small as our Portuguese community continued to grow. Members of the community would often stop Father to ask him when they would have the church built. He would always tell them to pray and that through their prayers, work, and sacrifice, a church would be built.

In August, 1960, Father was authorized to look for a site for the church. On September, 1960, the site was found on Huntington Road. On April 22, 1961, Father Caldas took up residence at Our Lady of Fatima Rectory. This was a big step closer to the building of a House of God, and for which they had prayed so hard. On October 15, 1961, a ground breaking ceremony was held at the site of our church. From April 23, 1961 to August 26, 1962, Mass was held at Beardsley School—just across Boston Avenue. On September 2, 1962, Mass was held for the first time in the basement of our church.

Father Caldas lived in St. Augustine's Cathedral for five years and we cannot find words to thank the pastors, assistants, and the parishioners of St. Augustine's for the kindness shown to Father Caldas.

The project of building the Portuguese church in Bridgeport was authorized by the first bishop of Bridgeport, The Most Reverend Lawrence J. Shehan who went on to become an Archbishop of Baltimore.

On September 23, 1962, the dedication of our church was officiated by the Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, the second bishop of Bridgeport.