



## Episode 12: St. Ann's, Dallas

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Thank you for joining us for the Dallas Road Trip where we are exploring Dallas Catholic History in our own backyard. I can hardly believe it but we are at our last stop on the Dallas Road Trip for Episode 12: St. Ann's in Dallas.

If you've attended a game at the American Airlines stadium, you may have spent some time in what is now known as the Harwood District. Marked by its signature Harwood bulls, the area was once almost entirely populated by hundreds of Mexican-Catholic refugees of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>1</sup> The neighborhood, or *barrio*, was appropriately and affectionately named "Little Mexico". A corner of the *barrio* still stands in tribute to St. Ann's.

After initial assistance, the *barrio* soon grew to be very independent."The *barrio* existed as a city of its own with schools, restaurants, apartments, theaters, churches, parks, and grocery stores."<sup>2</sup> Leonor Villareal, who grew up in St. Ann's, shares her memories of the *barrio* fondly. The people there were proud- it was important for them to have washed and pressed clothes and to keep the streets clean.<sup>3</sup> One of Leonor's favorite parts about life in the *barrio* was her community at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, a mission church established for the refugees in 1914<sup>4</sup>, and St. Ann Schools- established in the 1920s.

Church was at the center of life. The other church in the area was the then called Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. "Built in 1869, the cathedral at 2215 Ross Avenue had been, historically, a place where Mexicans were not welcome. From the first through

<sup>1</sup> [History of St. Ann's School Dallas Texas](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Texas State Historical Association Texas Handbook- Little Mexico](#)

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Leonor Villareal, by Katie Aguilar, April 2021

<sup>4</sup> [St. Ann School Landmark Nomination](#), 5

the fourth decades of the twentieth century, they were not allowed to enter the church, let alone worship there. At mid-century, they were relegated to pews at the rear of the church. One woman states: 'I went to the cathedral one day because I was [too] late for services at Our Lady of Guadalupe. I was told by an usher to leave and go to my church.'"<sup>5</sup> At Our Lady of Guadalupe, there were no bounds; if you were of Mexican descent, you came, and often on foot. The school was named St. Ann's after Mrs. Ann Kilgallen, a generous donor from Chicago who made the new school building possible.<sup>6</sup> Parish life enforced the strong bonds of community: there was rosary every night, enchiladas from the Guadalupanas on Sundays, and great celebrations for the novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe.<sup>7</sup>

Tragically, there is not much left to be seen of St. Ann's. In 1965, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church was merged with the Cathedral<sup>8</sup> and in 1965, St. Ann's Commercial High School for Girls was closed, followed by St. Ann's Elementary School in 1974.<sup>9</sup> Today what is left can be found in Saint Ann Court, part of the Harwood International development. Leonor speaks highly of Gabriel Barbier-Mueller, of the development firm *Harwood International*, and his wife, Ann. They have demonstrated their respect for St. Ann's history by restoring and preserving the tiled mosaic of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which now can be found in the courtyard, and have even taken members of St. Ann's to eat at the restaurant.<sup>10</sup> Leonor and her peers, the alumni of St. Ann's, work hard to tell and preserve the story of St. Ann's, and until Covid, had been at the Texas State Fair for 19 consecutive years with a pictorial display of Little Mexico- which covers St. Ann's and Our Lady of Guadalupe.

We began our road trip remembering the first Dallas Catholics, who didn't have church buildings in which to worship and we conclude our road trip with the story of a beautiful, strong Catholic community who wasn't welcome in the church buildings we had. Moving forward, today, we have the opportunity to make the Dallas Catholic Church a place where the hospitality of God, who invites us to share in His Divine Life, is extended to all people. This is the type of Church that you can make possible. This is the type of Church of which to be proud. This is the Church to which you belong. Thank you for joining us in this adventure through Dallas Catholic history!

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<sup>5</sup> [St. Ann School Landmark Nomination](#), 17

<sup>6</sup> [History of St. Ann's School Dallas Texas](#)

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Leonor Villareal, by Katie Aguilar, April 2021

<sup>8</sup> [St. Ann School Landmark Nomination](#), 18

<sup>9</sup> [History of St. Ann's School Dallas Texas](#)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Leonor Villareal, by Katie Aguilar, April 2021