

Chapter V

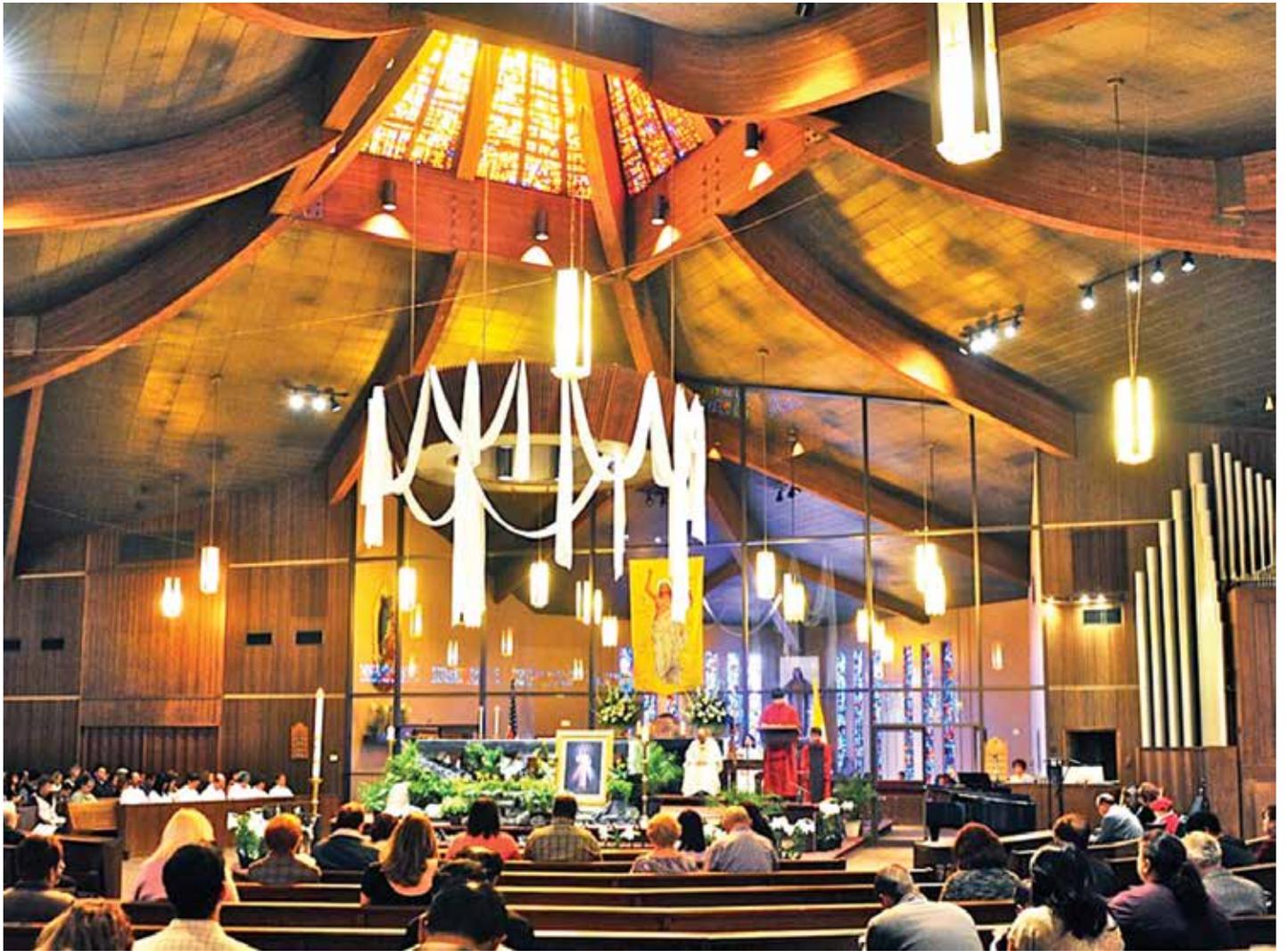
POWER OF THE SPIRIT

CHURCH OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

TURLOCK

**OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION
OF THE PORTUGUESE CHURCH**

TURLOCK



CHURCH OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

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THE FAITH OF GENERATIONS

Manuel Pedras went out to his mailbox to collect the mail. He opened the box, and there it was, the envelope he had been waiting for! It was from the county recorder's office in Modesto, and inside was the deed to his property! It was 1902, and Manuel looked back on his life and marveled at the hard work and good luck he had experienced: the good luck of leaving the tiny island of Corvo in the Azores and surviving as a whaler before he landed in Boston in 1890; the good luck of arriving safely in California after the long train ride across country; the hard work and loneliness of working as a shepherd in Merced County and driving the sheep over the Sierras to Yerington, Nevada; the bad luck of renting land and planting a sugar beet crop that he lost to drought; and finally, the good luck and hard work of buying a small, three-acre plot of land in sandy Turlock that he planted in sweet potatoes and after paying off the mortgage on the three acres in just one year, holding in his hands the deed to his own property.

Manuel was one of hundreds of Portuguese men and women who made their way to the Turlock area at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century to begin a new life in America. These immigrants mainly became farmers and dairymen, but many made their livings in other pursuits. Notably, Joe R. Fernandes, also from the Azores, had been a stowaway but was able to reach California and Turlock in 1905. He worked at the Charles Geer ranch for \$30 a month and bunked with many of his fellow Azoreans. He saved his money and bought a small dairy, but his real passion was horses. He began raising huge draft horses for large draying firms in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and he himself had contracts to level streets and haul concrete. The Fernandes teams laid the first asphalt streets in Turlock in 1910.¹

The 1890 to 1910 era is replete with stories of hardworking Portuguese immigrants carving out successful lives in California's Central Valley. A daughter of one of these early settlers describes them as men and women of earnestness and determination who, with dogged effort, struggled with the land, pests, weather, and sometimes ill

(Opposite)

Interior of the Church of the Sacred Heart. Photo courtesy of The Portuguese Tribune.

Holy Ghost festa in Turlock, 1913. Photo courtesy of Mary Lima.



health to wrest a living in America. This inborn tenacity that came with them from the lava rock country that was the Azores, where inhabitants were always at the mercy of the elements with no avenues of escape or protest, made them strong men and women.

The Portuguese of the Turlock area were aware of the many new churches that the other Portuguese communities in California had built or were in the process of constructing. Sacramento had its three Portuguese churches, Bu-hach was complete, Hanford had been built, and San José was under construction.

Turlock had a small wooden structure that had been built in 1888 by Irish immigrants, located on Broadway and A Streets, and this became Sacred Heart. Originally a mission of St. Stanislaus in Modesto and sufficient to serve the early Catholics of Turlock, the small church quickly became obsolete with the huge wave of Portuguese immigration to the area after 1900. In 1910 Sacred Heart became a parish of its own, and a building fund was established. The Portuguese were an integral part of that project; the building committee included Antone Vieira, Joseph Silveira, Manuel Pedras, Manuel Robella, and Manuel Serpa.

In designing the new church, San Francisco architect John J. Foley incorporated Romanesque architecture with renaissance style, using a red brick veneer on the exterior and framing it with cornices of white medusa cement and towers of galvanized metal that were painted and sprinkled with white Monterey sand. On the interior, the Oregon pine woodwork was stained to match the oak pews. The church had a seating capacity of four hundred. Next to the church, a two-story rectory for the priests was built with the same brick veneer to match the church.

The new Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was dedicated in a ceremony held on March 10, 1912, with the Most Reverend W. P. Riordan, archbishop of San Francisco, officiating. Four priests assisted him. The original wooden Sacred Heart Church was not abandoned. Soon after the cornerstone of the new church was laid in November 1911, the original structure was moved across town and placed at the corner of Cooper Avenue and Rose Street, where it continued to be used as a parish hall for the next five decades.

On September 9, 1928, a tragic fire destroyed the beautiful brick church. The community came together, and within one year they were able to reconstruct the church on the same foundations and in the same style. The replacement church cost



Original Sacred Heart Church, built in 1888. Photo courtesy of Mary Lima.

Second Sacred Heart Church, dedicated in 1912. Photo courtesy of Mary Lima.



\$30,000. Soon after, in 1930 during the Great Depression, a man came to the parish and asked for a place to sleep and some food. Father Samuel Tarrant accommodated this hungry vagrant. Before leaving, the man asked the priest for painting supplies. He proceeded to paint the risen Jesus with outstretched hands and St. Margaret Mary kneeling at his feet. The huge painting, eleven feet wide and seventeen feet high, hung behind the altar of the reconstructed church until the church was demolished in 1970. The painting was saved, but it has never been hung in the new church, due to the cost of the extensive restoration the painting requires.²

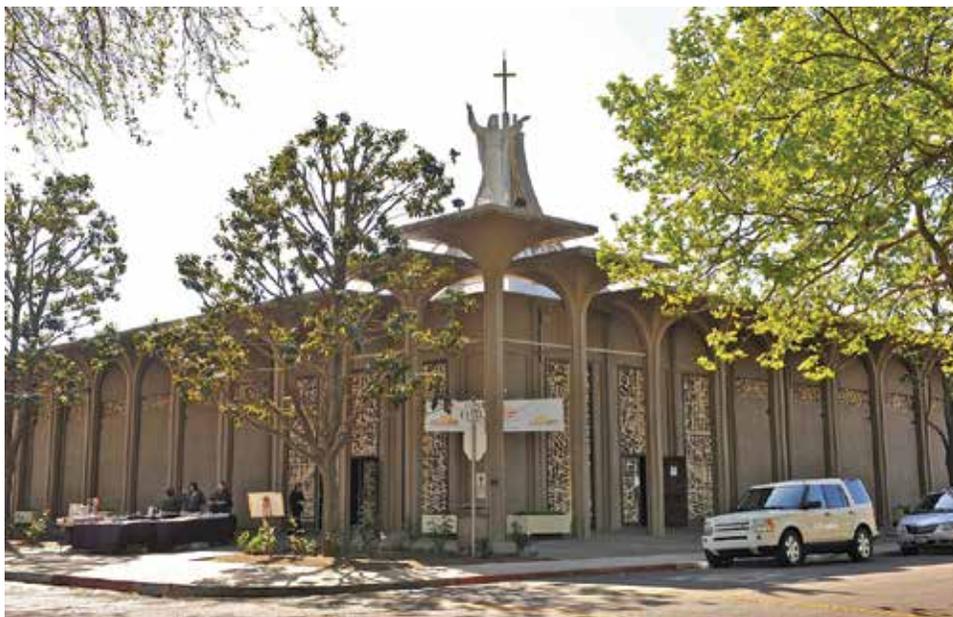


The Turlock region was very conducive to farming, and in particular, watermelons.

During the Second World War, Italian prisoners of war were confined in what is now the Turlock County Fairgrounds. Apparently they were not kept in tight security, because those who wished were brought to Sacred Heart Church for Sunday Mass. They sat in a special section that was reserved for them at the back of the church.³

The April 22, 1972, *Turlock Daily Journal* reports that when the cornerstone laid in 1911 was opened, the contents revealed the large extent of the Portuguese participation in building Sacred Heart Church. The important contribution of the SPRSI and the UPEC Portuguese fraternal societies was noted, as well as the names on the building committee: Serpa, Pedras, Santos, Vieira, Oliveira, Novo, Lucas, Freitas, Goularte, and others. Mrs. Maria A. Goularte, who headed the SPRSI at the time, was mentioned. Her son Gilbert Goularte became the architect who designed the new Sacred Heart Church that would replace the 1912/1928 edifice.

This magnificent church stood for six decades serving the Portuguese immigrants in Turlock, but it became too small for the community. Another large wave of Azorean immigration after the 1957-1958 volcanic eruption in the Azores greatly increased



Façade of the new and modern Sacred Heart Church. Photo courtesy of Joe Machado.