



Rebuilding History

By Heather Anthony



“Father, our Saint Patrick’s is on fire!”

On April 5, 2007, the beginning of Holy Week leading into Easter Sunday, Father José Moreno was at Our Lady of Guadalupe leading his congregation through mass when those fateful words were whispered into his ear.

The sister church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Saint Patrick’s, which has been a fixture for 114 years in Milwaukee, Wis., was a victim of an electrical fire that began in the church’s basement and rose to the first floor.

After being informed of the fire, Father Moreno pedaled on his bike the six blocks to Saint Patrick’s, watching as the firefighters attacked the violent flames. When they were finished, the quest for action and restoration began.

The Restoration

Like many of Milwaukee’s parishes, Saint Patrick and Our Lady of Guadalupe are financially stressed. One proposal entailed blending the two sister parishes together, allowing at least one to remain active in its original capacity while saving money by closing the other. It seemed to be the most sensible solution even before the fire occurred, but the parishioners had resisted the blending of their churches. Passionate feelings about St. Patrick’s future arose not only from a strong connection to their congregation, but to their church’s 1890’s architecture and rich Irish history.

Problem Solving Put to the Test

In restoration, crises often involve *buildings* and *people* simultaneously. Saint Patrick holds a special place in its largely Spanish-speaking community for both immigrants and Milwaukee natives sharing their religious beliefs. Preserving and maintaining the church’s Irish heritage was extremely important. Even today, Milwaukeeans of Irish heritage

come from all over the city to attend mass there on Saint Patrick’s Day.

To help Saint Patrick retain its parishioners, time was of the essence for this project. The problem solving needed to combine speed, urgency, efficiency and quality. How *fast* could the restoration be completed *without compromising the quality* of work?

The answer was found in Kelmann Corporation and how the company proposed to handle the project. Kelmann committed a number of employees to this new project without impacting other projects in progress. This involved making decisions to either postpone or decline new projects in order to show the community their desire to accommodate the congregation’s needs. Kelmann worked out a production schedule that sometimes involved scheduling the cleaning process to coincide with the restoration teams.

Molly Hatfield, with Catholic Mutual Group, St. Patrick’s insurer, says, “The people of Kelmann have a true appreciation for the beauty of churches and their

