HISTORIC CHURCHES OF PHOENIX
While there may have been some Catholics among the early Anglo settlers of Phoenix, the bulk of which came from the post-Civil War South, to judge by the historic churches, the majority were Protestants, with undoubtedly a number of Jews. However, as Phoenix grew from its initial settlement in 1867, Mexicans, either born in Mexico or of Mexican descent, began to represent an important presence, especially with farming and related activities, including the expansion of the canal system left by the vanished Hohokam people. With time, houses of worship began to emerge for the predominantly Catholic Mexican. These photos were taken in June 2009 of historic churches of the Mexican community in Spanish; most of these institutions today include mass said in Spanish.
St. Mary’s Basilica
St. Mary’s Basilica began as a missionary church in downtown Phoenix and was taken over by Franciscan priests in 1895. The current structure was completed in 1914. Because of racial restrictions in place at the time, Mexicans were not welcome in the main part of church, but were allowed to celebrate mass in the basement.
Immaculate Heart of Mary
As the Catholic community grew, Immaculate Heart of Mary/Inmaculada Concepción de María was built in the 1920s by Mexicans no longer willing to attend services in the basement of St. Mary’s. Although almost destroyed by fire in the 1980s, Inmaculada Concepción remains one of the anchors of the Hispanic community in the Greater Phoenix Area.
St. Anthony’s
St. Anthony’s, in the La Sonorita barrio, one of the few remaining historic Mexican barrios in downtown Phoenix, is also an anchor of the Hispanic Catholic Community. Note the ample entrance stairs on two sides of the church, which permit for the communal assembly of the faithful before and after services.
Sacred Heart Church / Sagrado Corazón
Sacred Heart Church/ Sagrado Corazón fell victim in the 1980s to the expansion of Sky Harbor International Airport, which was responsible for the destruction of numerous Mexican communities in downtown Phoenix. Today, it stands alone, imprisoned behind a chain-link fence, a historic building that cannot be torn down, in a vacant field inhabited by jackrabbits, in the middle of flight paths to and from the airport.
A new Sacred Heart/ Sagrado Corazón has been created for remaining Chicano communities in central Phoenix, to the south of the former parish church.
Mount Carmel Church (original)
The original Mount Carmel Church in Tempe, on the NW corner of what is today College and University, was built in 1903 by a German Franciscan with the idea of bridging the Anglo community to the west and the Mexican community to the east (the immediate Mexican community was subsequently destroyed by the development of Arizona State University, although it continues to survive farther east, and has as its anchor St. Margaret/ Sta. Margarita María de Alacoque. The new Mount Carmel is located several miles east and south of the original church, and was built in the late 60s. The original church, now structurally unsound, is part of the Newman Center at Arizona State University.
St. Margaret, Tempe
Extensive Hispanic Catholic communities exist to the west, east, and south of Phoenix, in a large part are remnants of the extensive agricultural operations that once flourished in these areas of the Valley of the Sun. These areas are experiencing gentrification, and it is likely to be only a matter of time before the old Hispanic communities vanish.
St. Catherine of Siena
St. Edward the Confessor
As Phoenix grew out of the original central core, new churches began to be constructed, essentially with Anglo congregations but with today a large contingent of Hispanic parishioners.
St. Matthew
St. Mark
St. Gregory
St. Agnes
Our Lady of Guadalupe
Unquestionably the queen of Hispanic churches in the Valley is Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Guadalupe on the edge of Tempe and right off the I-10 as it heads to Tucson. There are restrictions on photography on the actual property of the church, and these images were captured from the periphery.
St. Pius X
St. Pius X is a mission church that now hosts the Black Ministry of the Diocese of Phoenix. Although mass is not said in Spanish in this church, its location and age make it likely that it has in the past been used for services for the Mexican community.