

What is going on in our South Florida SSPX Chapels?

The history of Tradition and Latin Mass in South Florida is today a heritage of the two prominent priests, Fr. Carl Pulvermacher and Fr. Timothy Hopkins.

Two SSPX Chapels in South Florida

Fr. Carl Pulvermacher an associated priest of the SSPX serviced Our Lady of Victory chapel in Davie, Florida, since 1991. Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre visited the chapel in 1982. (A picture of this visit is still hanging on the chapel wall to this day.) Fr. Pulvermacher lived in Davie until 2005.

Fr. Timothy Hopkins came to Miami in 1989 and became the priest of the Shrine of St. Philomena. In 1991, he lost the use of the church on Flagler and move the Shrine of St. Philomena at the 6th Street Chapel.

In 2005, when Fr. Pulvermacher left Davie due to many health complications, he entrusted his flock to his confreres, the Society of St. Pius X. During years, SSPX priests flied to Davie, Florida for the weekend mission run from all over the United States of America.

A SSPX Priory in Florida

In 2010 the Society of St. Pius X established the St. Thomas More Priory in Sanford, Florida which took care of Our Lady of Victory Chapel as well as Lake Worth and Fort Myers. The priests would come each weekend, driving the three-and-a-half hours down from Central Florida to Davie, Florida.

On November 2, 2011 Fr. Timothy Hopkins passed away. The faithful at the Shrine of St. Philomena requested the care of the Society of St. Pius X. During a while, the SSPX sent a priest from Kansas City every weekend.

Eventually the Priory of St. Thomas More took over and serviced both chapels of Miami and Davie. Fr. Rainer Becher, Fr. Anthony Haynos, then Fr. Thomas Brooks divided time and energy between the two locations.

2014 Attempt to Merge

In 2014, Fr. Anthony Haynos attempted to merge the two chapels of South Florida into one location; the project didn't go through as no suitable location was found and too many faithful opposed to the idea.

From 2016 to 2019, after long exhaustive efforts were made either to find or to build a new shrine in honor of St. Philomena in the present location on 6th street but the initial fundraising did not reach the expectations which could make the project feasible.

At the end of 2019, the attendance at the Shrine of St. Philomena is the same as in 2011, around 100 people. At Our Lady of Victory attendance increases and lightly overpasses 100 people.

COVID-19 Hits South Florida

In March 2020, the COVID-19 crisis hits South Florida. The stay at home order of the City of Miami effectively closes the Shrine of St. Philomena. No public Masses has been celebrated since.

Throughout this time of the COVID-19 crisis, Fr. Fabula, the actual pastor at Our Lady of Victory continues to serve Davie meanwhile Miami stays closed.

Attendance numbers at Mass in Davie increases significantly: without counting the faithful of the Shrine who were obliged to come now to Davie during this unfortunate crisis, Latin Mass people reach out to the only public Latin Mass in the area, many others discovered Our Lady of Victory as the other churches at large are closed.

In May 2020, the relic and statue of St. Philomena are moved from the Miami Shrine to Davie where the Saint now finds a place of honor in the sanctuary.

Pros of the Present Situation

At present both communities of Our Lady of Victory and the Shrine of St. Philomena have been cared for during this COVID-19 crisis in Davie

The attendance growth is staggering for the Sunday Masses (287) but also for the weekly Masses on Fridays and Saturdays (65). Notice that during this period many regular faithful have been legitimately staying away from meeting and are still not back to our Masses.

A third Mass is offered on Sunday. The increase number of confessions occupies almost the whole time of the priest, before and after Masses. The Sunday service starts at 5:30 am with the first confessions and ends at 12:00 pm with the third Mass.

The combination of the two communities and the newcomers allow a better Liturgy: the servers and the Choir from both places, united have significantly improved the quality of the ceremonies. (The recent funeral for Mrs. Blanca Seda is an example of all the combined effort to make a beautiful ceremony. It was an edifying testimony for the extended family).

The manpower for the cleaning and arrangements cuts the workload and increase the camaraderie.

The collections have gone up meanwhile we do not have to pay the overheads of two locations. The bookstore increased the sales in particular with more than 50 Missals in English as well as in Spanish.

Towards the Future

With the reopening of the places of worship in the city of Miami coming soon, our thought is not to reopen the Shrine at 6th street. We want to keep the advantages we have experienced with the merged communities and look for a new location for a new Mass center for South Florida.

1. This new location should be between the two historical locations in which we find our roots.

2. It will be a new Shrine for St. Philomena.
3. It should be big enough to welcome both existing communities, newcomers, and families.
4. It should allow a possible growth of the apostolate for South Florida. (Parish Hall, House for priests, Sunday school, Space for Recollection)

Conclusion: Improving Our Mission

Beyond the personal advantage or disadvantage of the different Mass centers, it is essential to discern God's will. We are asking ourselves this question: what is the best option to fulfill our mission? It can be summarized in the following points.

1. Serving the communities which have been entrusted to our care by the faithful priests, our predecessors.
2. It is a twofold duty. Towards God, we must offer the best Liturgy possible, and toward the souls: attentive preparation for fruitful sacraments.
3. Welcoming all souls of good will with the heritage of Tradition.
4. Preserving our priest's life according to the particular religious rules as member of the SSPX by caring about his spiritual life and good health.
5. Making the best use of our resources to maintain and to pass on this heritage.

This leads us to the final thoughts. Is it not Providential that the COVID-19 crisis, closed the Shrine of St. Philomena, brought the relic and statue of St. Philomena to Our Lady of Victory, gave us the experience the richness of a merged community, and increased our hope and enthusiasm with a significant growth when Masses throughout the world were closed to the faithful? Following on Providence, it seems that it is time to find, finance, and use a new Shrine for the Tradition of South Florida.

St. Thomas More Priory

May 16, 2020

Fr. Marc Vernoy, Prior

