

## “Saint Elizabeth” – The Little Mission on the Hill

**In the beginning**, there was a small community nestled in the beautiful hills above the Antelope Valley where each year the residents held a “49er Days” celebration. Sometime in the late 1950s, a Boy Scout Troop from nearby was asked to participate in the annual parade. Their leader, being a dedicated Catholic, would not allow them to be in the parade on a Sunday unless they could attend Mass. The nearest Catholic church was 25 miles away.

**Peter and Sara Chasse**, residents of Lake Hughes, decided to solve the problem and asked their friend, Father Felix Tang, to celebrate Mass in their basement for the Boy Scouts. Later, so many other local residents attended that **Father Martin Hiss**, Associate Pastor of Saint Mary’s in Palmdale, was contacted. After seeing the need here for Catholic worship, he celebrated Mass in the recreation building—originally built as a C.C.C. Camp during the Depression years. Mrs. Chasse and Mrs. Turner would get there early every Sunday to set up an altar and chairs before Mass. This continued for some time. A group of interested Catholics in the area then got together and formed the Marian Guild. Father Hiss assisted them in visiting Cardinal McIntyre to secure a loan. *God saw the need here for a church.*

**Many sites** were offered and considered in the area, which would be about the same distance from Lake Hughes, Green Valley, Leona Valley and Elizabeth Lake. The **Saich brothers** from Tweedy Lake bought and donated the beautiful location on Elizabeth Lake and Johnson Hill Roads, where the chapel was to be built. An abandoned hospital barracks at Edwards Air Force Base, left over from the war years, was obtained. It had to be cut in half to be moved to the chapel location.

**In 1959**, everyone enjoyed seeing **Don Rackett** on his bulldozer, carving out the “niche” on the hill that God had blessed the community with for His church. The foundation was poured, and the barracks was moved to the site. It took many work hours by many volunteers of many trades—both Catholic and Protestant. In fact, the Mission was jokingly referred to as *“The Catholic church the Protestants built.”*

**It was a tedious job**, turning an old barracks into a church. All the plaster had to be torn off inside, and then it was re-studded according to then-current codes. Many hard, yet enjoyable hours were spent by the men and ladies alike—some using vacations from their jobs. The ladies brought sack lunches, which broke up the monotony of “puttying up” the many nail holes and the like to get ready for the painters.

**The altar and Communion rail** came from the old St. Mary’s Church in Palmdale. The Saich brothers brought the bell from Montebello, California. The Chasses located the kitchen stove in Ventura. The kneelers were covered by Sara Chasse. The drapes that hung in the sacristy and the confessional doors, as well as the organ and other miscellaneous items were donated by interested Catholics—many of whom were not local residents. The large crucifix behind the altar was donated by **Lois and Gene Doughty** sometime in the sixties. It was brought to the United States by Gene, who was in the U.S. Navy and serving in the Philippines. Gene personally carried the crucifix from the Franciscan mission where it was made about five miles through the jungle to his ship. Upon its arrival in the United States, the Doughtys kept the crucifix stored while they searched for a church to which they could offer the gift. They heard about Saint Elizabeth Mission through **Leo and Lois Hoffman**, son and daughter-in-law of **Rose and Ernie Hoffman**, active members of the Mission. Father Hiss was very glad to accept it for the little church; he celebrated the first Mass here.

**Father Charles Dachtler**, as pastor of Saint Mary's, assisted in changing the Marian Guild to the **Saint Elizabeth Council**, organized in 1962. When Father Dachtler became pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Lancaster, he asked that the Mission belong to that parish.

**Father Mariano Biasio, C.S.J.** came to Saint Elizabeth Mission in 1968 from Saint Peter's Catholic Church in San Pedro. Around that time, the old Communion rail was removed; the altar was turned around to face the congregation. A new altar was donated by the **Norman Davis family**, in memory of Rosemarie's uncle, Leonard H. Frenette.

**In 1970 the Annual Turkey Dinner was started.** It was held on the first Sunday in November, replacing the fund-raising dinners that had been held on Palm Sundays in years past. The Turkey Dinner continues to be a tradition enjoyed by many residents of the Valleys' and Lakes' communities.

**In the summer of 1973** Father Biasio spent time in Italy, his homeland. On his return, he as surprised to find a new look to his church. The altar had been remodeled, paneling and enhanced lighting had been installed, and new Stations of the Cross had been added to the walls of the church. During **Father Alvarez'** term as pastor of Sacred Heart Parish many more improvements were made at the Mission. In 1979 new windows were installed, and the outside church walls were stuccoed, covering the old wooden barracks. Trees were planted in 1981 by men and boys of the church, and the old lights in the kitchen were replaced. A hall was added for CCD classrooms, Father Elder worked with the building committee to make the hall a reality; **Moreau Builders** provided the construction. It was dedicated during a ceremony held December 2, 1984 by Father Elder and Father Biasio, and it was named *Biasio Hall*. In the summer of 1985, carpeting was laid in the church and the kneelers were removed. An alcove was added to accommodate the choir in 1997. **Alex Flores** hand-carved two beautiful wooden doors for the front entrance in 2001, but the strong summer sun and cold winter weather warped them. They were replaced with less beautiful but more utilitarian main entrance doors in 2002.

**Father Biasio left the area** (temporarily) in the summer of 1986, and **Father Joseph Scalco, C.S.J.** took over as Chaplain for one year. On August 15, 1987 Father Serra Parish was established in Quartz Hill. Father Biasio was appointed pastor, and Saint Elizabeth Mission was incorporated into that parish.

**The Mission has been blessed** with the Congregation of Saint Joseph (Fathers and Brothers of Saint Joseph), who rotate each Sunday to make the drive up the hill to celebrate Mass. These dedicated priests included **Father Mariano Biasio**, 1968 until he suffered a stroke in 1995 and who passed away in February 2002; **Father Ernest Candelaria**, 1969; **Father Giampietro Gasparin**, 1980-1984 & 2009; **Father Joseph Scalco**, 1973-1974 & 1984-2009; **Father John Trimaglio**, 1986 to 1988; **Father Leonard Petcavage**, 1993-1996; **Father Louis Selmo**, 1988-1995. **Father Louis retired in August 1995 and returned to his home in Italy.** **Father Angelo Zonta** worked here before he went to the CSJ Mission in India in 1999. His place was taken by **Father Mark Withers**, originally from England, who came here from Avon, Ohio, 1999-2008; **Father Leo Dechant**, from Avon, Ohio, who became pastor in 2008. Several other CSJ priests have been part of our Saint Elizabeth family in the past. All have been teachers at Paraclete High School in Quartz Hill with the exception of Father Louis and Father Leo. **Father Ernest has recorded our history with is invaluable photography.**

*By Father Biasio and Dorothy Lavelle*

*(updated 2010 by Father Leo)*