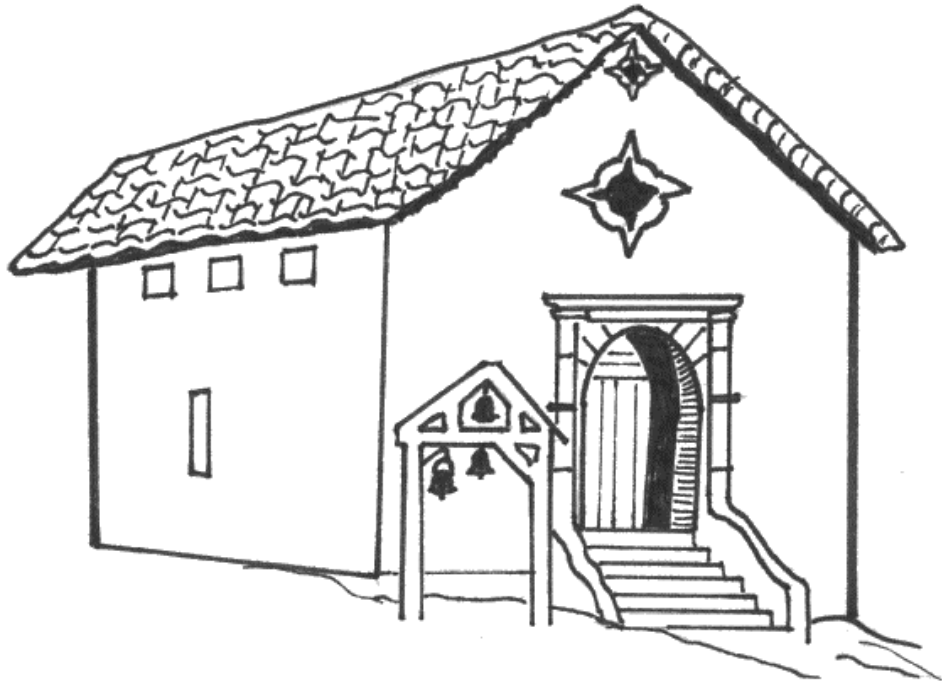


San Rafael Mission of Mercy

By Frank Lindh, Parishioner



“Mercy towards a human
life in a state of need is
the true face of love.”

- Pope Francis

As the world suffers through the COVID-19 pandemic, small acts of mercy are quietly occurring daily at the old Mission San Rafael. Volunteer members of the parish’s St. Vincent de Paul Conference are on the premises, providing bags of groceries and grocery store gift cards, along with homemade facemasks, and friendly words of encouragement, to people in need of assistance.

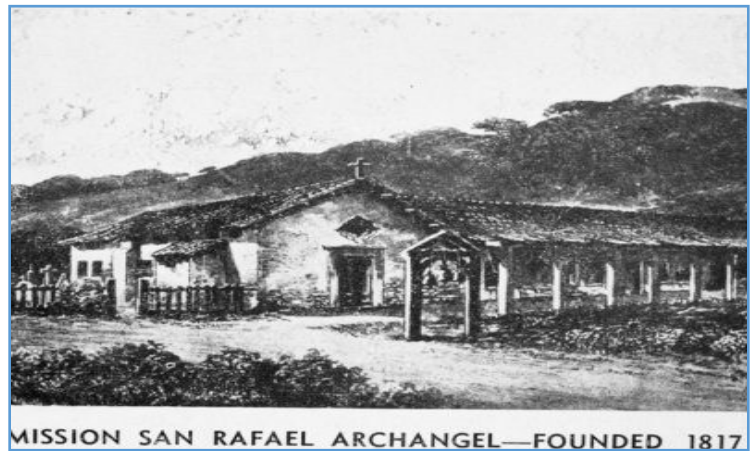


Other members of the St. Vincent's Conference are busy elsewhere, responding to requests for help with rent, medical expenses and other needs from client families.

It is fitting to pause and take note of this charitable work, because it was exactly sixty years ago – on April 23, 1960 – that the parishioners of Mission San Rafael formed the Parish Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Sixty years of steady service to the poor of San Rafael is surely a remarkable milestone.

Although it might seem sad, or even ironic, that the anniversary is occurring in the midst of a terrible pandemic, the fact is that the long record of organized charitable work by the St. Vincent's Conference at Saint Raphael's has prepared us well for this moment in history.



Moreover, the "Vincentians" of Saint Raphael's Parish, as they are known, are actually part of an old, deeply-ingrained tradition of compassion, dating to Parish's origins as a Spanish Mission over two hundred years ago.

Mission San Rafael was founded in 1817 as a convalescent hospital (a “hospital asistencia”) for native people from the Mission Dolores Basilica in San Francisco. They were gravely sickened by exposure to European diseases, to which they had little or no immunity. It was the pandemic of their time.



Thus, the Friars made a deliberate choice, in 1817, when they named what was then a humble little Mission in honor of the Archangel Raphael. Raphael is venerated by Christians, Jews and Muslims alike as the patron of good health. He is called a messenger “who announces the healing of God.”

Three points come to mind, as we observe the 60th Anniversary of the Mission San Rafael Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

First, the great majority of the people who come seeking assistance from the Conference are descended from the ancient peoples of the Americas. They are not “illegal immigrants” to this land. In fact, they are not “immigrants” at all, but migrants, from one region of the Americas to another. We are all brothers and sisters, and we are bounded together by love.



Second, the St. Vincent's volunteers who help people in need are cheerful and good-natured. They are not dour or sanctimonious – quite the contrary. Humor permeates their conversations. When they greet the people who come for help, it is always with a friendly face. The Vincentians understand the teaching of Jesus, that when we follow his command to help the poor, “you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” The Vincentians love their work. You can see it in their smiles. You can hear it in their laughter.

Third, the “Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy,” declared by Pope Francis and celebrated by the Catholic Church worldwide in 2015-2016, certainly helped prepare the Church for this extraordinary moment. How wise it was of the Pope, we now see in hindsight, to encourage a recommitment to mercy and compassion within the people of the Church, before onset of the global tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic. The kindness and foresight of the Pontiff were a gift. Like the compassionate work of the Friars who founded Mission San Rafael, the Pope's example is helping the people of St. Raphael's show “the true face of love” to those in need.

