



PHOTO BY NANO VISSEK



PARISH PROFILE

St. Ignatius Parish

San Francisco, California

By Samantha Bronson

The twin spires of St. Ignatius Church tower over nearby houses and buildings in San Francisco's Inner Richmond District, rising more than 200 feet above the street below. Their distinctive outlines, along with the church's iconic dome, are dramatic and recognizable features of the city's skyline, so much so that they were once used on maritime navigational charts.

"The church really sits as a beacon on the hill in a figurative – and literal – way," said Pastor Fr. Greg Bonfiglio, S.J. "It is a landmark in the city, a spiritual symbol of a greater spiritual reality."

For nearly a century, the stunning, city block-long church, built in the Italian Renaissance style with a facade of Corinthian columns, has drawn parishioners from near and far. Located on a corner of the University of San Francisco campus at Fulton Street and Parker Avenue, the church has an active and thriving parish community, with approximately 800 active families.

In all that it does, the parish aims to be an inclusive Catholic community that provides a welcoming place for parishioners to meet Jesus, Fr. Bonfiglio said. This year, St. Ignatius will mark its 20th anniversary as a parish while also celebrating the centennial of the church building.

The first St. Ignatius Church, dedicated in 1855, was a simple, wooden structure on Market Street, part of three modest wood-

framed buildings that made up the original site of what would grow into today's University of San Francisco and St. Ignatius College Preparatory. After moving several times, the current St. Ignatius Church was built and dedicated in 1914. Designated a parish in 1994, St. Ignatius Church seats nearly 2,000 people and hosts some USF events, including commencement exercises.

Parishioners tend to be well educated and primarily Caucasian, with a good number of African American, Filipino, and Chinese. All Masses are in English. Many parish families have young children, with approximately 250 youngsters going through the parish's faith formation program each year. The parish also includes a significant number of senior parishioners.

One of the parish's thriving ministries is its adult faith formation program. Through the Sunday Morning Conversations program, parishioners can deepen their faith by attending discussions on topics ranging from the importance of the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life to spirituality and ecology to the plight of refugees and the church's response.

"As a Jesuit parish, our goals include the primary goals of the Society of Jesus: Spirituality, especially around the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius; faith that does justice; ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, and finally the intellectual life of the

◀ **HOME ON A HILL:** (Clockwise from left) St. Ignatius Church on the University of San Francisco campus; Pastor Fr. Greg Bonfiglio, S.J., offers First Communion; the church at night.

church,” said Fr. John Coleman, S.J., associate pastor. “The adult faith formation program consciously tries to enact and mirror those goals of the Society of Jesus.”

For the adult faith formation program, Fr. Coleman not only draws from USF faculty to lead some of the conversations, but also faculty from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley as well as other distinguished speakers outside the area. Every summer, for example, the program offers two presentations by Fr. Thomas Reese, S.J., former editor of *America* magazine. Those talks tend to draw more than 100 people, Fr. Coleman said, but even the parish’s typical Sunday discussions draw around 50.

The parish also is known for its extensive social ministries. “Our social ministries programs are very strong and I think that’s a big self-identifier for the parish,” said Fr. Bonfiglio. “That factors large in the parish’s conception of itself, as in, ‘This is who we are.’”

Its longstanding Shelter Meals ministry provides home-cooked meals four times a month to several homeless shelters in San Francisco and, in some cases, serves the meals, as well.

“The purpose is to prepare a meal we would serve our own families,” said parishioner Therese Cannata, one of three program organizers. “Can we change their lives by serving one meal? Maybe not. But can we change the moment? Yes. With the food comes our spirit. We want to give to them a gift that brings something positive into their lives.”

Each year, the program provides about 11,000 meals with the assistance of more than 400 volunteers.

St. Ignatius regularly partners with St. Agnes Catholic Church (also a Jesuit parish) as well as USF’s University Ministry to offer parishioners various spiritual programs.

In February, the parish collaborated with St. Agnes, USF, and St. Ignatius College Preparatory to offer the Novena of Grace, offered twice a day – once at St. Ignatius Church and once at St. Agnes. Other partnerships include the parish’s director of worship also working with USF’s University Ministry and St. Ignatius Institute, as well as a number of USF students teaching the parish’s children’s faith formation classes.

“I think we can do more together if we think of ourselves as one mission of the Society of Jesus, incarnated in four different places,” said Fr. Bonfiglio.

Not only does Fr. Bonfiglio foresee more of these partnerships, but he also envisions a parish structure that relies more on shared leadership between clergy and laypersons. Through internal assessments, surveys, interviews, and meetings of the entire parish leadership, the parish has implemented a new organizational structure that fosters better communication among the various committees and invites greater participation from parishioners.

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–Fr. Greg Bonfiglio, S.J.
Pastor, St. Ignatius Church

“Most importantly, it also allows for more lay leadership and gives people the opportunity to live out their baptismal call to service.”

The overall goal, he said, is to provide an even stronger parish where parishioners share in the responsibility for the parish, where they are empowered to make decisions about strategic planning, and where they are given the opportunity to discern the future of the parish.

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The magnificent building that is St. Ignatius Church also contributes to the parish culture. Not only is the church stunning from the outside, but its interior is impressive, featuring a high ceiling, beautiful decorative arches, columns, the main and side altars, and detailed stained glass windows and art. The building’s continued beauty, however, has not been always a sure thing, given a leaking roof and other structural concerns in years past.

Fr. Bonfiglio’s predecessor, Fr. Charles Gagan, S.J., saved the building from decay, initiating a successful capital campaign in the 1990s to repair the roof and for other much-needed construction projects. “Thanks to Fr. Gagan’s phenomenal work,” Fr. Bonfiglio said, “the church is in great structural shape.”

AT A GLANCE

ST. IGNATIUS CHURCH

LOCATION 650 Parker Ave, San Francisco

WEBSITE <http://stignatiussf.org/>

TELEPHONE (415) 422-2188

PARTIAL LIST OF MINISTRIES

Children’s Faith Formation,
Helping Hands, Shelter Meals,
Sunday Morning Conversations
(Adult Formation)

**REGISTERED
PARISHIONERS**

800
active families

