

*COMPLETING THE WALK:*

# **ANNOUNCING THE ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH FIORENZA PLAZA**



THE ARCHDIOCESE OF  
GALVESTON-HOUSTON

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The journey is still going on, but we’ve made progress  
in the last 20, 30 years or more.*

*But we can’t stop now; we have to keep going.”*

– Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza



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## PURPOSE

After responding to numerous challenges over the last 15 years – including Hurricane Ike in 2008 and Hurricane Harvey in 2017, the 2008 financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic – the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston is moving forward to complete the master plan for Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral first developed over two decades ago. The Archdiocese, led by Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, will redevelop the block directly south of the Co-Cathedral building (across St. Joseph Parkway) and rename it The Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza Plaza – adding new green space, new parking for 144 vehicles, as well as a public gathering and tribute area.

“It is most fitting to honor Archbishop Fiorenza’s memory and create a beautiful gathering space for the parishioners of Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral,” said Cardinal DiNardo.



## BACKGROUND

The Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, like many urban cathedrals, towers over the downtown landscape and draws the eye in as a visual symbol of the heart and vibrancy of the Catholic faith in southeast Texas. The impressive scale of the 28,000 square foot building seems at home among the other dominant structures that together form the skyline of the fourth largest city in America, a recently (in 2004) elevated Archdiocese, and the energy capital of the world. This new structure readily took its place among major “destination” cathedrals in the United States upon its consecration on April 2, 2008 – the same day it officially replaced the old Sacred Heart church as Co-Cathedral.

Earlier, more ambitious plans for the new Co-Cathedral included a pew seating for 2,100 and a crypt and chapel underneath the building that drove the cost estimate to \$100 million. These features were eventually scaled back in the interest of both the cost-consciousness and the “elegant simplicity” that Archbishop Fiorenza and the building committee emphasized throughout the project. Along the way, Archbishop showed the building plans to Pope John Paul II, who immediately gave his blessing. “Houston needs a big cathedral,” His Holiness said.<sup>1</sup>

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[https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/110BD94B00002328?search\\_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BCathedral%2BFiorenza&date\\_from=1998&date\\_to=2008&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Cathedral%20Fiorenza&content\\_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&pdate=2006-04-01](https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/110BD94B00002328?search_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BCathedral%2BFiorenza&date_from=1998&date_to=2008&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Cathedral%20Fiorenza&content_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&pdate=2006-04-01)





In the end, the new Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart cost \$49 million, seats 1,820, and – perhaps most importantly – was designed and constructed to be able to serve the Archdiocese for 500 years. Its traditional, Romanesque architecture differed from the contemporary approach of several other U.S. cathedrals built during the same timeframe, including Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles and the Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland.

By the time the new Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart was consecrated in 2008, it would also symbolically reflect Houston's elevated status within the Roman Catholic Church as a newly designated Archdiocese (2004) and boasting the very first

Cardinal in the American South (2007), Houston's own Cardinal DiNardo. With the 2004 designation, incidentally, Texas joined California as the only U.S. states to have two archdioceses each.<sup>2</sup>

Since Cardinal DiNardo presided over the dedication of the new Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in 2008, the old parish church on the corner of Pierce and Fannin Streets has never again been used for public celebration of the liturgy. Built in 1912, it was actually the second church constructed on that block (in a different location) to serve the parish. Subsequent alterations to the old church took place over the ensuing decades through a patchwork of renovations and additions.

At the same time, the City of Houston and the surrounding communities began to grow rapidly. Between 1950 and 1960, in fact, Houston's population grew by 50 percent – from nearly 600,000 to just under a million people according to U.S. Census data.<sup>3</sup> By 1958, Bishop Wendelin Nold of what was then still called the “Diocese of Galveston” oversaw 39 parishes within Houston. Galveston, with the constraints of being situated on an island, had six.

Given these trends, in November of 1958 the Apostolic Delegate of the Vatican to the United States authorized Bishop Nold, at his request, to designate a co-cathedral of convenience in Houston where pontifical ceremonies could be held for the benefit of the over 400,000 Catholics then living here.<sup>4</sup> In response, Bishop Nold identified the parish church at Sacred Heart as his preference to serve as a co-cathedral based, in part, on its location close to the property recently acquired for a chancery or administrative office. The Vatican decree issued on behalf of Pope John XXIII a year later added “Houston” to the name of the Diocese and officially established the Sacred Heart as the co-cathedral in the newly re-named Diocese of Galveston-Houston. But as Bishop Nold announced at the time:

*This promotion of Houston ... does not change the status of Galveston as an episcopal city as established in 1847, making it the first such city in the State of Texas. When there are two cities designated in the name of a diocese, each of them*



2 [https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/107528E561A36F37?search\\_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BCathedral%2BFiorenza&date\\_from=1998&date\\_to=2008&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Cathedral%20Fiorenza&content\\_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&page=2&pdate=2004-12-30](https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/107528E561A36F37?search_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BCathedral%2BFiorenza&date_from=1998&date_to=2008&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Cathedral%20Fiorenza&content_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&page=2&pdate=2004-12-30)  
 3 [https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/Demographics/docs\\_pdfs/Cy/coh\\_hist\\_pop.pdf](https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/Demographics/docs_pdfs/Cy/coh_hist_pop.pdf)  
 4 <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=CTR19591231-01.2.105&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->



possesses a cathedral. The original city possesses a cathedral; the second city has a co-cathedral. Galveston and St. Mary Cathedral Basilica have always had – and always will possess – a unique, historic, and very special standing within this Archdiocese and the State of Texas. Yet, while population levels on Galveston Island have remained relatively stable since the late 1950s, demographic trends in Houston, Harris County and surrounding communities have continued to accelerate.

Faced with this explosive growth, Archbishop Fiorenza in the late 1990s realized that the old parish church at Sacred Heart was no longer adequate to meet the expanding needs of our region. Around the same time, severe structural problems in the old church came to light that, at the time, would have cost millions to repair.

Starting in 2000, during the Diocesan Jubilee Year capital campaign to raise funds for a new Co-Cathedral, Archbishop Fiorenza was transparent about the intention to replace the old Sacred Heart parish church to make way for needed new parking. The following year, in May of 2001, Archbishop Fiorenza publicly announced plans to build a true cathedral in Houston. “Long ago we outgrew Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral, which seats less than 800 people,” he said at the time. The Houston Chronicle coverage of the new Cathedral announcement also noted that the old Sacred Heart church “will be demolished to make way for parking and a plaza.”<sup>5</sup>

It is important here to note that, between 1999 and 2007, just the parish flock of Sacred Heart grew from under 400 families to over 2,300 families. This put tremendous pressure on the old Sacred Heart facilities for worship, office, event and parking spaces. The dedication of the new Co-Cathedral, a transformational and fundamentally important development, would only alleviate one of these issues: worship space.

For this reason, in December of 2006, the Archdiocese also purchased the former Federal Reserve Bank Building on the northeast side of San Jacinto from the new Co-Cathedral and named it “Cathedral Centre.” After remodeling and renovations, Cathedral Centre and its modern, updated rooms began serving as Sacred Heart’s parish offices, the parish hall, music rooms, and event spaces – all functions once provided by the older Sacred Heart facilities off Pierce Street.

The acquisition and remodeling of Cathedral Centre left a single, yet still major, need unaddressed: parking. So in 2007, the Archdiocese re-announced that the master plan for the new Co-Cathedral included replacing the old Sacred Heart church and buildings with a new landscaped parking area and plaza to be known as “Cathedral Green.”

Recent events, however, have given way to a more inspired vision of the future that also honors the individual most responsible for the new Co-Cathedral itself – an enduring gift to the 1.7 million faithful in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.



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[https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/0ECC8A9D6C45584D?search\\_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BTroy%2BGately&date\\_from=1998&date\\_to=2010&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Troy%20Gately&content\\_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&page=1&pda te=2001-05-23](https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/0ECC8A9D6C45584D?search_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BTroy%2BGately&date_from=1998&date_to=2010&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Troy%20Gately&content_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&page=1&pda te=2001-05-23)

## SACRED HEART PARISH TIMELINE

- **1847:** The State of Texas, including present-day Houston, is elevated to the full rank of a diocese as part of the Diocese of Galveston, encompassing all of Texas and parts beyond with St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston as its seat.
- **1896:** Sacred Heart Parish is founded with the first church being dedicated in 1897 on the eastern side of the block (where the empty school building now stands).
- **1912:** The original Sacred Heart church at the southeast corner of Pierce and San Jacinto Streets is replaced by a larger church at the corner of Pierce and Fannin Streets.
- **1920:** To replace the original wooden rectory, a new two-story brick rectory is built under the direction of Rev. Morgan Crow.
- **1922:** The original parish church at Sacred Heart is demolished so that a new school could be built in its place.
- **1950s:** The second church undergoes major renovations, along with the rest of the property. Air conditioning is added and the interior and sanctuary were completely redesigned (and statuary added), while a new larger rectory including parish offices was built in 1957.
- **1959:** Pope John XXIII designates Houston as an episcopal city with co-equal status to Galveston, changing the Diocese of Galveston to the "Diocese of Galveston-Houston." Instead of building a new cathedral, Sacred Heart Church is designated as the co-cathedral owing to its centralized location.
- **1960s:** With the Diocese's increase in stature, more interior renovations are conducted and most of the wood paneling on the walls is introduced.
- **1967:** Declining enrollment and increasing costs leads to the closing of Sacred Heart School.
- **1990:** The last major renovation of the "old church" is completed, and are significant enough that the church is rededicated by Archbishop Fiorenza.
- **2001:** Archbishop Fiorenza announces plans for the Archdiocese to construct a true cathedral and plaza to replace the old church.
- **2006:** Acquisition of the Federal Reserve Building/Cathedral Centre to serve as Sacred Heart's parish offices, hall, music room, events spaces, and other needs.
- **2008:** Consecration of the new Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral.
- **2023:** Announcement of the Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza Plaza.



## ANNOUNCING THE ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH FIORENZA PLAZA



**DANIEL CARDINAL DINARDO, LEFT, CONFERS WITH  
ARCHBISHOP FIORENZA.**

The death of the Most Reverend Joseph Anthony Fiorenza at age 91 on September 19, 2022 brought to close an extraordinary life dedicated to selfless service. Throughout his priesthood, the pastoral care Archbishop Fiorenza brought to countless disadvantaged and underserved communities, combined with his fierce and relentless commitment to social justice, served to improve the human condition throughout the Houston region and beyond. As Archbishop Fiorenza once said, “to separate faith from action essentially is not biblical, nor is it Catholic.”

A native of Beaumont and a graduate of St. Mary's Seminary here in Houston, Archbishop Fiorenza began attending civil rights marches and gatherings even as a young priest. In 1965, he drove to Alabama to join one of the Selma Marches with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Back in Houston, he met and befriended Rev. William Lawson (now Pastor Emeritus of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church) – and with the late Rabbi Emeritus Samuel Karff of Congregation Beth Israel, they formed the “Three Amigos” working together on interfaith and social justice initiatives.



**THREE AMIGOS: RABBI SAMUEL KARFF, REV. WILLIAM LAWSON AND ARCHBISHOP FIORENZA.**

For example, Archbishop Fiorenza, Rev. Lawson and Rabbi Karff established the Coalition for the Homeless in 1987. Archbishop Fiorenza and Rev. Lawson were also active in the Neighborhood Recovery Community Development Corporation, the Renaissance Corporation, and the Allen Parkway Village Task Force – groups that work to renovate existing houses for low-income and homeless families. In 1995, Archbishop Fiorenza again joined with Rabbi Karff and Rev. Lawson as founding members of the Anti-Defamation League's Coalition for Mutual Respect, a group of clergy and community leaders formed to present a unified voice against bias, bigotry, and discrimination.

The child of Sicilian immigrants who repeatedly witnessed the injustices of segregated society during his childhood, Archbishop Fiorenza was also a voice for the rights of immigrants and migrants all his life. In 1988, moreover, he established a ministry to those affected by AIDS, regardless of their faith background. He supported the work of The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) from its founding in 1984, and was a member of the Board of Directors of United Way. As a priest he directed the diocesan Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the domestic anti-poverty and social justice program of the American Bishops, and as a Bishop himself he chaired the national campaign. His fellow Bishops selected him to chair the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1998-2001.



**ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS FIORENZA SPEAKS AFTER BLESSING THE CO-CATHEDRAL'S BELLS ON DEC. 12, 2007, AHEAD OF THE CO-CATHEDRAL'S OPENING IN DOWNTOWN HOUSTON.**







Heart from the old church, for example, will serve as a focal point of interest for the new Fiorenza Plaza, along with other elements that will be integrated into the design. The Plaza itself will physically encompass roughly 60,000 total square feet and afford the Archdiocese and church-goers 144 spaces of needed new parking, as well as new trees and 6,000-square feet of public gathering and tribute space (roughly half comprised of grass) in the northeast corner of the block. The public gathering space will have a 12' x 24' vertical pavilion, and altogether the gathering space will be capable of accommodating 200 people.

The City of Houston, the State of Texas, and indeed our country and world have experienced numerous significant challenges since the new Co-Cathedral was consecrated 15 years ago – hurricanes, various economic crises, a global pandemic, and more. This reimagining of “Cathedral Green” to honor a godly man who led this Archdiocese from 1984 to his retirement in 2006 seems entirely fitting in its timing and in its intention to finish the master plan he set in motion.





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and create a beautiful gathering space  
for the parishioners of Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral.”*

– Daniel Cardinal DiNardo

## CHALLENGES TO A SAFE AND PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENT

Over the last 15 years, the old Sacred Heart facilities and property have been the target of an escalated pattern of both illegal and dangerous activity. In November of 2008, for example, a murder victim's body was found near a stairwell outside the old church during daylight hours.<sup>6</sup> Since 2012, moreover, some three dozen criminal acts have been reported to police on and in the vicinity of the old Church property including theft, burglary, robbery, assault, arson and rape.

In particular, theft from and vandalism of the property has grown more frequent. Despite many and varied attempts to secure the premises, trespassers have been persistent and, in fact, caused extensive damage. Aside from structural damages to doors, gates, and windows, numerous fires have been set inside the building.

Over time thieves have stripped the building of every source of copper (wiring, pipes, etc.) that could be found. This damage caused a cascading list of issues. As infrastructure for the air-conditioning was stripped, for example, the buildings were no longer able to be kept climate-controlled. As pipes were cut, leaks and open flows of water were left undetected which led to water damage and extensive mold.

Finally, in January 2022, a major fire (suspected to be arson) broke out in the old rectory, which led to extensive damage to walls and holes in the roof.

Unfortunately, this extensive damage and the onset of mold have left the premises unsuitable for human habitation. It is a serious health hazard, including to those who might trespass there.

Out of concern for the spiritual significance of the few remaining furnishings inside the church, the decision was made a year ago to remove any salvageable, surviving fixtures from the interior of the old church. The Statue of the Sacred Heart will be used as a focal point for the new Fiorenza Plaza, while the stained-glass windows have already been recovered and transported by the parish of Vietnamese Martyrs to assist in the construction of their new church. This was deemed by parish leadership to be fitting, as the Co-Cathedral was an original home for Vietnamese Catholics and still features a vibrant Vietnamese population to this day.

## PROTECTING OUR PATRIMONY

A year ago, concern for the spiritual significance of the few remaining furnishings inside the old Sacred Heart parish church prompted the decision to remove any salvageable, surviving fixtures from the interior. The Statue of the Sacred Heart will be used as a focal point for the new Fiorenza Plaza; the old organ and a stained-glass window went to St. Cecilia's; while the remaining stained-glass windows were already recovered and transported to Annunciation Church and the parish of Vietnamese Martyrs to assist in the construction of their new church.

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[https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/0ECC8A9D6C45584D?search\\_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BTroy%2BGately&date\\_from=1998&date\\_to=2010&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Troy%20Gately&content\\_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&page=1&pdte=2001-05-23](https://houstonchronicle.newsbank.com/doc/news/0ECC8A9D6C45584D?search_terms=Sacred%2BHeart%2BTroy%2BGately&date_from=1998&date_to=2010&text=Sacred%20Heart%20Troy%20Gately&content_added=&pub%255B0%255D=HCBF&page=1&pdte=2001-05-23)



## **Timeline of Recent Incidents at the Old Sacred Heart Property**

- **4/9/20** – Discovery of trespassers living in the rectory. Windows on second floor broken. In addition, break-in through stained glass window of church.
- **4/15/20** – Copper gutters and flashings stolen.
- **4/23/20** – Second floor window of school broken out.
- **4/24/20** – Air conditioning copper lines stolen; visible evidence of campfires burning along front wall of rectory.
- **4/28/20** – Trespasser arrested inside rectory.
- **1/28/21** – Interior patio door of rectory broken; basement garage raided for copper pipes, tubing, and wiring. Basement flooded.
- **12/6/21** – Pierce Street door and multiple windows found broken and used to gain entry. Electric wiring in old school was stolen.
- **12/22/21** – Trespassers removed an 18-foot ladder from the rectory basement and used it to climb the school roof to access the wiring.
- **1/31/22** – A 2-alarm fire at parish office and rectory. Extensive damage, holes in roof and windows, fire crews find the premises to be unsafe.
- **2/1/22** – Break-in at the rectory through glass and sawing through plywood that was supplied by an outside contractor after the fire.

## THE ARCHDIOCESE'S COMMITMENT TO PRESERVATION

The Catholic Church in downtown Houston has a beautiful history which can be seen in its many historical structures. While St. Vincent's, the original parish in Houston of the 1830s, did not survive to the twentieth century, the next oldest parishes remain in service to the people to this day. The Church of the Annunciation near Minute Maid Park, which was formed out of St. Vincent's parish and dedicated in 1871, has undergone new renovations and remains the oldest standing Catholic church building in Houston.

St. Joseph Parish was established out of Annunciation in 1881, and in 1882 St. Patrick's was founded as a mission of St. Joseph, eventually becoming the fourth parish of Houston. While St. Nicholas, the first Black Catholic Parish in Houston traces its origins to 1887 and still proudly remains in the Third Ward, it originated as a school before it was designated as a parish several years later.

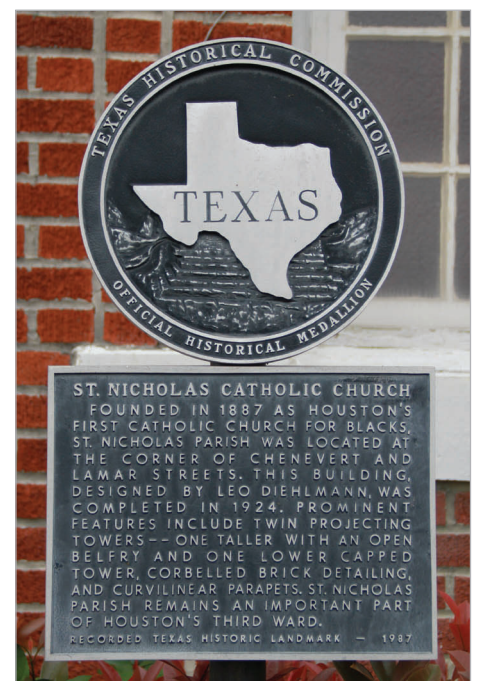
Of course, it bears repeating that St. Mary Cathedral Basilica in Galveston has always held – and always will hold – a unique and historic position as the Mother Catholic Church of the State of Texas, dating back to 1847. It is furthermore the original Catholic Cathedral in this Archdiocese. In 1979, Pope John Paul II elevated it to the status of a “cathedral basilica” because of its historical importance, and the Archdiocese has devoted significant resources to preserve and maintain the building. This commitment was recently demonstrated after Hurricane Ike pummeled Galveston, and flooded St. Mary Cathedral Basilica with eight feet of water. The damage was so extensive it took several years to raise the needed funds to return this historic structure to its original splendor. The Cathedral Basilica has been fully restored both on the interior and exterior, and remains in use today.

All security and structural concerns aside, the old Sacred Heart parish church that served as Co-Cathedral from 1959 to 2008 has been renovated on numerous occasions and bears no resemblance, at least on the interior, to its original design. Most recently, the changes were so extensive that Archbishop Fiorenza found it necessary to re-dedicate the building (in 1990). As to the church's exterior, Archbishop later wrote that “the exterior architectural design (of the old church) has no particular historical importance.”

Simply put, the old Sacred Heart church was not the original church in its own parish; it was never built to serve as a true Cathedral; and while it served the normal functions of a parish church until 2008, it has never been the site of a Papal visit or other such historic event. Archbishop Fiorenza determined over two decades ago that there was no compelling architectural or historical rationale to divert additional resources from Archdiocese's preservation budget to restore the old Sacred Heart church – and that emphatically remains the case today. Those funds are best used to maintain the Archdiocese's other historic properties previously noted.



**TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER AT ST. MARY BASILICA IN GALVESTON (ABOVE) AND ST. NICHOLAS IN HOUSTON (BELOW) ARE TWO OF THE AREA PARISHES THAT HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED HISTORICAL LANDMARKS.**



## **“COMPLETING THE WALK”**

While some might understandably miss the old church at Sacred Heart for various reasons, the benefits of finishing Archbishop Fiorenza’s master plan to the parishioners and the Archdiocese would be immense, and would also underscore an important reality: while the parish itself dates back to the late nineteenth century, in 2008 it entered a new and more significant chapter as a living parish church and also as a true Cathedral built not to last decades ... but centuries.

Archbishop Fiorenza’s motto on his coat of arms cited one of his favorite phrases from the Gospel: “Thy Kingdom Come.” Using these words from the Lord’s Prayer, he regularly prayed that everyone might share in the reign of God. Speaking to this he once said, “We haven’t completed the walk yet. The journey is still going on, but we’ve made progress in the last 20, 30 years or more. But we can’t stop now; we have to keep going.”

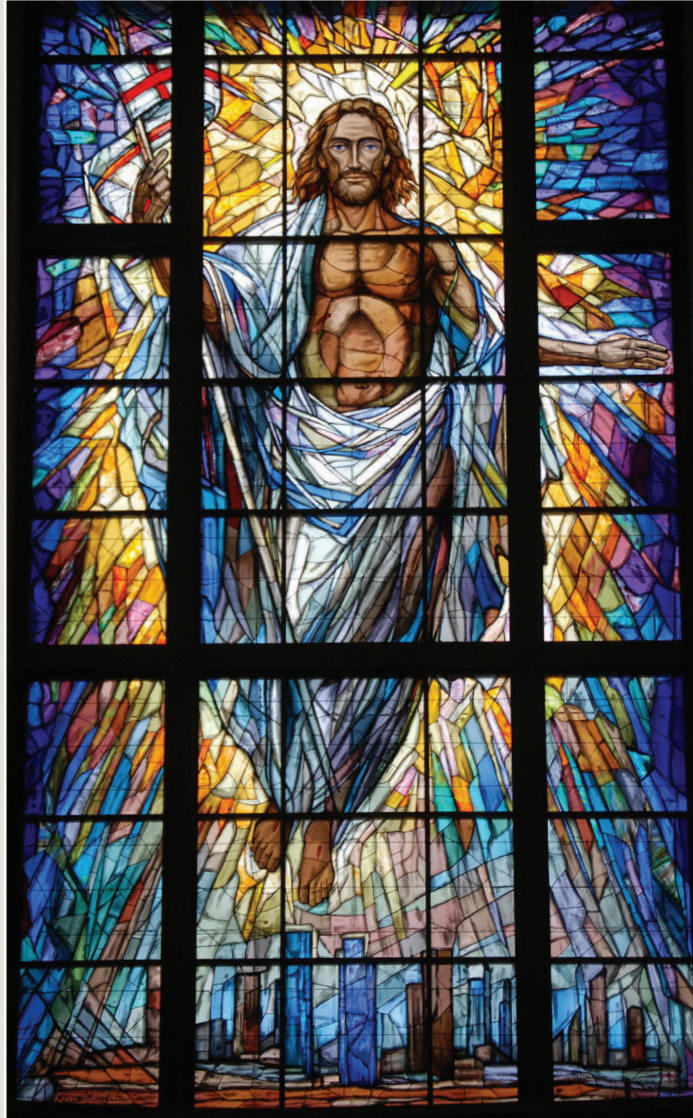
Archbishop Fiorenza was speaking at the time about the fight for social justice, but he could have just as well been encouraging us as it relates to the Co-Cathedral project. The work is not done; the journey is not over. As the Archdiocese looks to the future, the highest and best use of our resources is to move forward with replacing the old Sacred Heart buildings and redevelop the block adding new green space, new parking for 144 vehicles, as well as a public gathering area.

To so many, and for so many reasons, finishing this master plan without properly honoring Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza’s seven decades of selfless service to this Archdiocese would, itself, be an injustice. It is the very least we can and should be doing to commemorate his meaningful life, his abiding love of all, and his enduring legacy.

The Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza Plaza is the right project, at the right time, for the right reasons.







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