

San Nicolas Parish History

Patron: ST. NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINE

Founded in 1584

The beautiful church of San Nicolas de Tolentino Parish speaks of the numerous people who kept the Catholic faith alive despite the turmoil of the past 400 years brought about by calamities that destroyed the church building and by the Aglipayan schism, which threatened the Christian community.

The community began as a visita of Vigan in 1575. Every year, an Augustinian missionary visited this community of Malay origin that settled south of the Padsan River. Under the patronage of St. Lawrence the Deacon, the first chapel of bamboo and cogon was built for the visita. This was replaced with a small church of masonry, wood and cogon. But this was soon destroyed by earthquake and typhoons.

In 1701, Fray Antonio de Villanueva constructed a bigger and more massive church about half the size of the present one. This construction was completed in 1703 only to be toppled down by a strong earthquake on November 14, 1707.

In 1733, a strong typhoon ravaged Ilocos Norte, and many of the townspeople took refuge in the church. They asked for the help of St. Lawrence, but the typhoon did not stop. Later, they turned to St. Nicholas of Tolentino, and the typhoon and ensuing flood miraculously subsided. This was the time that the town and the parish took the name of St. Nicholas of Tolentino.

In 1895, the church belfry was constructed under the leadership of Fray Victoriano Garcia, himself an architect and an engineer. Molasses was mixed with lime as a strengthening chemical for the stones and bricks.

During the revolution of 1898, the Katipuneros occupied the church. A year later, the American forces took over the church and used it as headquarters. However, the U.S. government ordered that churches be vacated by military forces. Gregorio Aglipay, together with renegade priests, took this opportunity to take over the church. Majority of the Catholics in the town embraced the Aglipayan Church. However, the Supreme Court decreed that the sequestered properties of the Catholic Church be returned by the Aglipayan rebels. The building was returned, but its records and movable properties could not be retrieved anymore.

During World War II, the church was occupied by Japanese forces, and its belfry became a watching post. After the war, Rev. Catalino Racca started the repairs of the church.

Before the turn of the millennium, the church façade and belfry went through a major facelift. New bells were added to the old set. Today, the parish boasts of having the only automated belfry in Ilocandia.

In 2004, the church underwent yet another makeover. But more than the physical transformation which is immediately palpable is the fervor of the faithful to wield greater zeal and strength of spirit to renew and be renewed and courageously walk the stretch ahead. Moreover, the faithful, motivated by their pastors, are invigorated with the spirit of charity and unity that fires up their hearts and spurs them on to do what they can for the good of the Church. Now, all they have to do is stay on course.

Since the creation of Laoag as a diocese, the following priests have served in the parish: Rev. Catalino Racca, Rev. Mauro Resurrecion, Rev. Juan Ballesteros, Rev. Policarpo Albano, Rev. Sylvio Lacar, Rev. Gil Albano, Jr., Rev. Rodolfo Nicolas, Rev. Amador Foz, Rev. Domingo Albano, Rev. Jose Agustin, Rev. Ruben Abaya (with Rev. Rey Magus Respicio then Rev. Engelbert Elarmo as assistants), Rev. Mario Garaza (with Rev. Joel Reynold Castillo then Rev. Nolasco "Tom" Pascua, Jr. then Rev. Lorenzo Torrefflores as assistants), Rev. Ramon Danilo Laeda (with Rev. Melchor Palomares as assistant).

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