

December 14

On this day in 1949, the newly built Mt. Carmel Church was blessed and officially opened to the people of Saipan.

The new church replaced the Bithen de Carmen Church in Garapan Village which had been destroyed during World War II.

For several years after the war, the Saipan community worshiped in a small church that was housed in a former NKK company store at the northern end of Chalan Kanoa. But the community was not satisfied with this temporary building and wanted a permanent church established as soon as possible.

A survey party consisting of Joaquin S. Cabrera, Jose C. Cruz, Joaquin Kaipat, and Juan A. Sanchez recommended that the new church be built just north of Chalan Kanoa Village on the site of the former Japanese sugar refinery.

Architectural plans developed for the new building called for it to be of a size and design consistent with the pre-war Garapan church.

Construction commenced in June 1947 under the overall supervision of Brother Gregorio Oroquieta, SJ and Father Ferdinand Stippich, O.F.M. Cap. In early 1948, Fr. Ferdinand accepted a sizable cash donation from the naval government made in support construction efforts.

Construction work, which required two years to complete, was first headed by Manuel Duenas Pangelinian and then later by Francisco Muna Deleon Guerrero. Labor was voluntarily provided by members of the community.

Other men who played an important role in construction efforts included Mariano Aldan, Vicente Aldan, Francisco Baza, Jose Baza Indalecio Cruz, Fredrick Dela Cruz, Benigno Kaipat, Tomas Rios, Pedro Rogolofoi, Jose Romolor, Ador Roppul, Jose A. Sanchez, Juan A. Sanchez, Antonio Selepeo, and Jose Selepeo.

As construction neared completion, Fr. Ferdinand searched for a statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel so that it could be placed atop front tower of the new church. When one could not be located, a decision was made to replace it with a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On December 14, 1949, Mt. Carmel Church was blessed by Bishop Baumgartner in a ceremony witnessed by hundreds of the island's faithful.

Mt. Carmel Church was later upgraded to a Cathedral in 1984 with the establishment of the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa.

For over six decades, this edifice has served as a monument to the work and dedication of island's Catholic community.



A procession headed by Bishop Baumgartner blesses the new church (photo courtesy of the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa).



Hundreds of Saipan residents celebrate their first mass in Mt. Carmel Church on Wednesday, December 14, 1949.