



Reverend Antony Britto
Sacred Heart's 13th Pastor
2012—2018

Father Britto served Sacred Heart parish in a multitude of ways, over his six-year tenure, while at the same time serving as Pastor to a neighboring church (St. Thomas the Apostle).

Father Britto was born on May 16, 1961, in Madurai, India, where he was raised in a family of seven children. His parents are Dhanasamy and Philomena. He has two older sisters, Josephine and Germaine, two younger brothers, Sagayam and Stephen, and two younger sisters, Clara and Arul. He had a desire to serve people at a very young age and the older he got, his yearning to serve Indian and foreign missions grew deeper and led him to his priestly journey. Father Britto earned his bachelor's degree in Philosophy from St. Joseph College and his degree in Theology from St. Charles Seminary. He was ordained to the priesthood on May 14, 1988 at St. Vincent Pallotti Church, Madurai, India. He served fourteen years in India and six years in Italy prior to coming to the United States.

Before becoming Pastor of Sacred Heart, Father Britto first came to Michigan in 2008 where he served as Associate Pastor at St. Thomas and Our Lady of Grace parishes. In 2010 he was moved to Stanton and Edmore. In 2012, he became the Pastor for both St. Thomas and Sacred Heart. In addition to his priestly duties, Father Britto also taught Italian to students at Muskegon Community College.

It was in 2012 when Father Britto was approached by Most Rev. Bishop Hurley about taking the role of Pastor at Sacred Heart. With his desire to live and serve communities of multiple ethnic backgrounds and groups, Fr. Britto willingly said yes to the Bishop's request. He was quickly warned by the Bishop, as well as several friends and parishioners, that Sacred Heart's neighborhood was not considered safe and he should not live there. Father Britto saw this as an opportunity to bring the Muskegon Heights community together so despite the warnings, he chose to live in the Sacred Heart rectory. That decision was the beginning of the transformation of the now very beautiful property that our church community adores. That choice by Father Britto, even though it had many challenges in the beginning, brought a sense of pride among the Muskegon Heights community and a natural respect for things such as the Memorial Garden. A place that was once a ground for racing traffic and destruction, is now a place of prayer and meditation for Sacred Heart families to enjoy.

Father Britto left our parish better than he found it. As Father Britto became more and more familiar with Sacred Heart, its people and systems, he slowly began to find ways to improve parish life overall from parishioner involvement in the church, to developing systems that would provide for a more sustainable financial future for the church. In particular, he was a "master" at his ability to bring people together. Using this gift, as well as a great deal of courage, he made some difficult and somewhat unpopular decisions at the time, such as eliminating the free use of our parish facilities to God's kitchen or no longer spending money on yearly missalettes. However, while making these challenging decisions, he was, at the same time, able to engage parishioners in special ways that gave them a feeling of belonging. For example, the church offered, in place of the missalettes, song books that could be used by a family as a way to honor a loved one by allowing them to donate and then have their loved ones name listed in the cover of the weekly song books. Another example is the Memorial Garden. In order to cut down on the destruction of the church property and instead give parishioners a quiet place for prayer, the Memorial Garden became part of the landscape and in this instance again, parishioners were offered a special opportunity to purchase memorial brick pavers as a lasting memory of loved ones. It was ideas such as these that not only gave parishioners an eternal memorial, it has also added and continues to add to the financial sustainability of our parish.

Other ways in which Father Britto brought families together was through his priestly offerings to us. The addition of Saturday morning Mass allowing the first week of the month to also be an anointing of the sick was very dear to many parishioners. Offering first Friday evening Mass and Novena. Making the decision that parents of First Communion and Confirmation students attend preparation classes along with their child. Requesting that those Muskegon Catholic Central students receiving financial support from the parish, in turn donate their time and talent back to the parish. Encouraging the Knights of Columbus and our CCD teachers and students to say the rosary before each weekend Mass. Bringing the *Anima Christi* prayer to the closing of our Mass. Taking the time to celebrate each day of Divine Mercy week with parishioners. Being a fierce advocate of the unborn and joining others in the march against abortion or standing for hours in advocacy of closing the Muskegon abortion clinic, were all ways in which he taught us to have conviction for our faith. He even brought the Muskegon Heights community at large together by hosting a food truck for neighborhood families and providing our parishioners an opportunity to volunteer. He led by example, working tirelessly and although he faced criticism at times, his efforts to improve our parish never ceased. His conscious stewardship over our parish for six years led to a greater amount of student involvement in both CCD and the children's choir. He even resurrected the children's Christmas play, increased parishioner involvement in lay ministry, as well as involvement in community wide events and left us financially stable.

Father Britto was very disciplined when it came to protecting the parish finances. Throughout his tenure, Sacred Heart operated in good budget standing. Again, this was not always popular and took a lot of audacity but having him be fiscally responsible also allowed Sacred Heart to make some major and much needed improvements to our campus. We were able to repave our "horribly broken" parking lot. Install proper fencing around much of our grounds and install our Memorial Garden. All these improvements led to a much safer and beautified church property.

Father Britto had a very special touch and believed his mission was all about building up people, children, and families. He understood the importance of building strong relationships with people. No matter what your background, he wanted all to feel that sense of belonging. He showed that in how he took exceptional care and was extremely meticulous in his preparation for the hosting of special events. Whether it be the happiest of occasions such as the marriage of two people or the very sad occasion of saying goodbye to a loved one during a funeral. He was sure to get to know families by spending time with them, understanding their background, what challenges they or their loved one faced in life, as well as many other intricate details to make these celebrations special and personal for all in attendance. This was certainly a unique and appreciated skillset of his

His personal touch also came out in his attendance at all events happening within the parish. He always made it a priority to be present and with the people. Whether it was one of the many dinners put on by the parish, or weekly Bible study, altar society meetings, Confirmation and First Communion prep class, weekly coffee and doughnuts, being a member of Muskegon Catholic Board of Education, etc. Every one of these occasions afforded Father Britto the opportunity to get to know the people of Sacred Heart and he cherished those times.