

# History of the League

The Catholic Police, Fire and Peace Officers League of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was founded in 1900 by William J. Ryan, a Philadelphia Firefighter. The League was dedicated to the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its mission was to provide for the spiritual needs of fire fighters. The League helped recruit clergy to provide the sacraments and celebrate mass for firefighters, who due to their work schedule had a difficult time participating in regular church services. William Ryan was a true visionary, who sought to develop a strong foundation for the League; he brought stability and recognition by petitioning the state legislature for an official charter from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The charter, still in existence, details for the public an official record of the goals and objectives of the league.

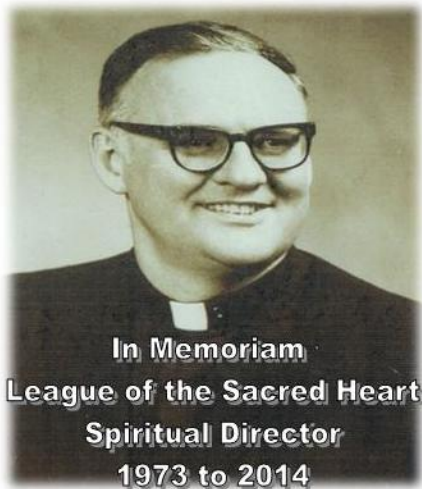


The League's first home in 1900 was [Old St. Joseph's Church](#) on Willings Alley in the Historic Old City section of Philadelphia . Founded by Jesuits in 1733, Old St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church is Philadelphia's oldest Catholic community.



In 1910 Philadelphia Police Officers asked to be included in the League and they were allowed to participate along with Sheriffs Deputies and Correction Officers. The name of the League was changed to include them and they began to participate in the spiritual blessings that the League provides.

**In 1923, due to the growth in membership, the League moved its home to Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter & Paul in 1923 at 18<sup>th</sup> and Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Center City Philadelphia.**



**With the move, the Pastor of the Cathedral became the Spiritual Director of the League.**

**Rev. Msgr. James J. Howard held that position from 1973 until his death in 2014.**

**Msgr. Howard's forty one years of service as Spiritual Director is believed to be the longest service of any clergy to the League.**

**The Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter & Paul continues to be the home of the League hosting the Annual Communion Breakfast Mass and Annual Memorial Mass. The Cathedral's pastor, Rev. Dennis Gill, serves as the League's new Spiritual Director.**



The League's current President for the 2014-2016 term is retired Philadelphia Police Officer Veronica Sypherd; she is the first woman to serve as President. The League has received tremendous support from F.O.P. President John McNesby. Through the efforts of President McNesby the League continues to assist our ten thousand members.

For one hundred and fourteen years the League has served its membership and the Catholic community at large, through various events, charities and works of mercy, including: The Annual Communion Mass and Breakfast; the annual memorial mass honoring our deceased members and their families; the annual Malvern Laymen's Retreat, the placement of our banner at the funeral service of our deceased members, the visiting of the sick and distribution of Holy Communion in local hospitals, providing financial support to the Cathedral and St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, annual awarding of the St. John Neumann and St. Katherine Drexel Award for Catholic evangelization, tending to spiritual needs.

The League continues to be a visible witness of the Christian faith and through its devotion to the Sacred Heart and steadfast prayers for renewal; the League remains a continuing resource for our public safety membership.