

24 Hours in Toledo

## SS. PETER AND PAUL CHURCH [2 TO 3 P.M.]

### Baby Kevin's baptism continues a tradition

Originally published in *The Blade* on Sunday, April 22, 2007

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There's magic in this man's words.

*Yo te bautizo en el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espiritu Santo.*

The Spanish bubbles from the priest's mouth like a soothing brook, like the actual waters he's pouring over the baby's head.

He stands at the front of Ss. Peter and Paul Church in South Toledo, but all eyes are on the little one, outfitted in his lovely white tuxedo, complete with a tiny vest and bow tie, about to truly begin his life in the Catholic faith.

*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

The boy, Kevin Joel Delgado, is only 8 months old. He has wondrous eyes to complement his pudgy cheeks. He is perfectly content, totally calm.

For the moment.

The church echoes with the words of the priest, the Rev. Richard Edward Notter. He's been doing this for 44 years, much of it in Spanish — ministering to migrant workers in the early days of his career, now leading the only parish in the city to have Mass in Spanish every Sunday.

This is a neighborhood with strong Hispanic roots. Families came from Mexico to work on railroads years ago; later they were drawn by work in the fields or canning plants. Many, like Kevin's parents and godparents, still come out of necessity and hope.

"Life here is much better than Mexico. There are more opportunities," Evangelina Lopez, his godmother, who lives in East Toledo, says in a later interview. She speaks in Spanish because her English is not very good.

Kevin's father, Mario, 40, is a dishwasher in Detroit, where the family lives. His godfather, Gabriel Lopez, 36, works at a local Mexican restaurant. Both work long hours and neither has time to learn much English.

They're here at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday because it's their only day off work, and it means there will be no traditional Mass before the baptism. The rest of the church is nearly empty, save for a few young family members milling around.

It's a happy but serious occasion. It's the day when Catholic theology says Kevin will receive the effects of redemption of Christ dying and rising.

"You have asked to have your child baptized," the priest says in Spanish during the ceremony. "In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him in the practice of the faith."

The four adults stand with Kevin and pledge to bring him up to follow God's commandments. They promise to reject sin and oppose Satan.



The Rev. Richard Edward Notter in Ss. Peter and Paul Church, a few days after the baptism. (THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY)

Kevin takes it all in silently, lying back against his proud mother, Martha, 32. His eyes stare 30 feet up toward the church ceiling, fixated on something there as he sucks on a pacifier. His tiny arms, motionless at his side, are swallowed up in his coat sleeves.

When the group walks over the baptismal font, Kevin remains quiet, completely unsuspecting. Even when his godmother tips his head back toward the fountain, he plays it cool as his eyes roam from face to face.

Then Father Notter scoops out a bit of water in a seashell and pours it over the boy's forehead, symbolic of washing away the original sin dating back to Adam and Eve.

At first, there is no reaction. A second later, Kevin's head jerks violently. It nearly knocks into the fountain, and the others reach in to steady him.

For the first time all afternoon, Kevin cries — a loud, rousing wail.

And then it's over. The crying, that is.

There are still a few more rituals, prayers, blessings before they can celebrate with lunch at a local Chinese restaurant. For Kevin's parents, this age-old ritual of baptism is how they pass on part of their heritage. For the godparents, who are cousins to Kevin's family, it's something more — a promise.

"Our role would be to provide for the child if the parents are unable, to be good examples for him," Mrs. Lopez explains in a later interview. "It is an honor to be asked because you know then that you are highly regarded."

The baptism itself wasn't exactly how things would have gone back in Mexico, but it's close.

"In Mexico, after Mass people gather outside and wait for the baptisms to end and the godfather comes outside and is required to throw currency and coins to the people who await," Mrs. Lopez says.

Here, there's no one waiting outside. Instead, they hand out a few lovely "Feliz Bautizo" favors, thank Father Notter, and open the church doors to the blinding sun of a beautiful afternoon.

*Blade staff member Olivia Herrera contributed to this report.*

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