

## 1879 Mass in St. George Tabernacle an example of interfaith cooperation

By Marie Mischel, Intermountain Catholic, May 10, 2019



*The St. George Tabernacle was the site of a May 25, 1879 High Mass celebrated by Father Lawrence Scanlan, who became the first Bishop of Salt Lake.  
Intermountain Catholic/Deacon Lynn Johnson*

ST. GEORGE — On May 25, 1879, an unusual event took place at the St. George Tabernacle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That day, Father Lawrence J. Scanlan (later the first Bishop of Salt Lake) celebrated Mass in the newly completed tabernacle. The Catholic Church in nearby Silver Reef was not yet completed. The St. George Tabernacle Choir, directed by John MacFarlane, sang the liturgy of the Mass, a Mass in D by composer William Cumming Peters, copies of which they ordered especially for the event.

Fr. Scanlan celebrated the Mass at MacFarlane's invitation. The two had become friends after staying at the same hotel in Silver Reef, a mining community 20 miles northeast of St. George, which had a robust Catholic population. MacFarlane, who lived in St. George, was deputy U.S. mineral surveyor at Silver Reef and spent the weekdays there. He was also the director of the St. George Tabernacle Choir and shared a love of choral music with Fr. Scanlan.

MacFarlane invited the priest to celebrate Mass at the tabernacle on the condition that Fr. Scanlan bring his Silver Reef congregation to attend. LDS historical reports indicate Fr. Scanlan celebrated the Mass with permission from LDS Apostle Erastus Snow, who supervised the settlement of LDS Church members of southern Utah, and St. George Stake President John D.T. McAllister.

To prepare for the Mass, the tabernacle choir practiced nightly for six weeks, according to the MacFarlane family. Legend says Fr. Scanlan even made several trips to St. George prior to the Mass to ensure the choir understood the meaning of and was able to correctly pronounce the Latin wording of the hymns.

Three thousand people attended what reports say was the first High Mass celebrated in southern Utah. Mormon observers greatly outnumbered the Catholics from Silver Reef.

Fr. Scanlan claimed to have previously celebrated Mass in Mormon churches but this was the only documented instance. Prior to the Mass, he explained the significance of the vestments

he would wear and shared the basic history and doctrine of the Catholic Church. The theme of his homily was "True adorers of God adore him in spirit and truth." It was reported by some sources to have lasted two hours, but other sources say it was instead a speech after the Mass.

"After 'Mass,' Father Scanlan preached a discourse explanatory of the doctrines of his church," an LDS report from the day said.

"I think you are wrong, and you think I am wrong, but this should not prevent us from treating each other with due consideration and respect," the priest said at the beginning of his remarks, according to the LDS history.

From the Catholic perspective, Fr. Scanlan "delivered the clearest, most informative speech I've ever heard," an unidentified French Catholic who was present reported. "He proved the truth of the Catholic Church in a perfect style, interesting manner and in a way that couldn't be contested. He gave the history of the Institution up to this time and created an impression on the Mormons of St. George that won't fade."