

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SACRED HEART OF JESUS CATHOLIC CHURCH

CULLMAN, ALABAMA

Thank you for visiting with us today.

You can find more archival and history
information on our website at

<https://www.sacredheartchurchcullman.org>



Inside the current Sacred Heart Church building taken about 1915



Photo courtesy of Dave Warren Photography

Rev. Linus Klucsarits, O.S.B.
Pastor

Sacred Heart Church

The land on which Sacred Heart Church is located was deeded to Bishop John Quinlan, Bishop of Mobile in 1873 by the Kyle, Madden, and Osborn families for a Catholic Church to be erected, according to the records and deeds located in the archives of the Diocese of Mobile.

On April 9, 1874, the first Church was officially named “Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” and was blessed by Monsignor Baasen with approval from Bishop John Quinlan. This first church building was a log cabin style with no windows, and split logs for pews.

During 1874 the Catholic community had grown so much it was able to establish a board of trustees that included John Fromhold, August Gruenger, Herman Lehring, John Maier, and Ferdinand Krellhaus. Later that year the South and North Alabama Railroad Company gave four lots to the trustees for use by the Catholic Community for a rectory and school.

On Oct 30, 1877 the first resident pastor, Fr. James Meurer, a German-speaking priest came to Sacred Heart. On Nov 1, 1877 Sacred Heart became an official Parish. Soon after, construction of a new second church (which was a little white church without a steeple), a small house for the Pastor, and a small convent for the sisters began and was completed before Dec of 1878.

Also in 1877 Joseph Fromhold deeded land for Sacred Heart Church to Bishop Quinlan, and in 1878 the trustees transferred the title of all the property given to them by the South and North Alabama Railroad to the Bishop as well.

Benedictine priests began their tradition of service as parish pastors in 1888 and soon after came the foundation of St. Bernard Abbey (1891) and Sacred Heart Convent (1898).

Sacred Heart Cemetery

The Sacred Heart Cemetery has long been presumed to have been established in 1877 by Fr Meuer. It is unknown exactly where this first bit of land came from or from whom. Though no deed has been recorded, legend has it that Col. John Cullmann, founder of the city, appropriated this tract for the church at the edge of town in the Fromhold Addition.

In November 1887 Joseph Fromhold and his wife deeded more land for Sacred Heart cemetery to Bishop O’Sullivan. The original cemetery encompassed approximately five acres, situated between 8th and 9th Streets Southeast at 8th Avenue. The oldest grave found in the cemetery is from November 18, 1877, marking the burial of Anselm Fretz, Grand Dukedom of Baden.

In 1998, more land was purchased for expansion of the cemetery, bringing the total to approximately ten acres. A Land Management plan has been prepared to achieve maximum utilization of the property. New sections are being developed and plans are underway to build a Columbarium and to create a memorial garden with Stations of the Cross. Recently a new beautiful wrought iron fence was installed around the area.



For twenty years Sacred Heart School was staffed by the Notre Dame Sisters. On March 20, 1892 the Sacred Heart Convent of Benedictine Sisters was founded. In 1898, the Benedictine Sisters replaced the Notre Dame Sisters and began to staff and teach at the school.

Due to continued growth at the school, construction on what is the current schoolhouse began in 1948. The new stone school was completed and dedicated in 1950 during pastorate of Rev. Marion Schwallie, O.S.B.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the Leaven of the Immaculate Heart of Mary nuns, an institute of the Alliance of the Holy Family International, began teaching. They also work with local homeschooling families and Hispanic communities affiliated with Sacred Heart Parish.

First German Festival in Cullman

In the summer of 1977, the first German Festival in the city of Cullman was born at Sacred Heart to commemorate the school’s 100th anniversary. Two years later the City of Cullman Oktoberfest Committee was formed to make this a city-wide event. This event is now an annual festival for the school, the parish, and the city of Cullman.



Front of the Sacred Heart School



Inside the second Sacred Heart Church building taken about 1900

On Oct 24, 1910 groundbreaking for a larger church took place. The third Sacred Heart Church building was built of stone during the pastorate of Rev. Ignatius Mayer, O.S.B. who became Pastor 1905. The corner stone was laid on July 3, 1913. The third and current stone church was dedicated in 1916. The matching stone school was built during the pastorate of Rev. Marion Schwallie, O.S.B. during the late 1940’s.

Sacred Heart Church exemplifies a rather late example of the German Revival of the Romanesque style. There is a slight indication of the popular cruciform style, in that the sides near the east end of the nave, at the crossing, are somewhat wider than the rest of the side walls. Local sandstone was used on the exterior. The original roof was asbestos shingles.

The stained-glass windows were designed by the Von Gerichten Ecclesiastic Studio in Munich, Germany in 1914. When the last twenty-four of the windows were ready to be shipped to Cullman when the outbreak of World War I necessitated their burial to

protect them. They were dug up and shipped to Cullman after the war, and installed in 1920. The pipe organ (Austin Organ—Opus 1029), one of the largest in North Alabama, was built in 1921 and was acquired by Sacred Heart in 1959. It received a major overhaul in 1988.

The Family Life Center Program in 1991 was launched under Rev Cletus Meagher, O.S.B. during his time as pastor. The building includes a truly remarkable fireplace designed by Brother Jude Johnston, O.S.B., of St. Bernard Abbey.

In the fall of 1999 an extensive repair and restoration project was begun on the church steeples and roof, including gutters and downspouts. Twenty-three (23) tons of zinc, and 600 pounds of solder were used by Copperworks Corp. of Decatur for the job. There are 4,000 shingles on each steeple; each held in place with five nails.

The latest cleaning and restoration of the stained-glass windows was in 2011 under the leadership of then Pastor, Rev. Patrick Egan, O.S.B., who was assigned as Pastor in August 2009. The restoration ended with the installation of three new rose windows in the sanctuary and a new rose window in the school building. A new, elevated pulpit or ambo, as well as a display cabinet for the sacred oils, were also installed.



Photo Circa 1900 from left to right is the second church, the brick convent, and the school

Sacred Heart School

After the establishment of Sacred Heart Church in 1873 it is unknown if an actual school building existed until around 1877 when construction started which included a small convent for the Sisters from Notre Dame. On Dec 14, 1878 the sisters arrived from Milwaukee and began teaching on Dec 16th to both Catholic and non-Catholic children. By 1879 enrollment was at 100 students. On July 1, 1879 a construction of a new schoolhouse began, and by March 17, 1880 the building was completed and the Sisters moved into new quarters in the schoolhouse.

The school grew so much that in 1889 construction started on a new and larger schoolhouse. It had three large classrooms, a cloak room and meeting room for church societies on the first floor with a large hall of exhibitions, concerts, and fairs on the upper floor. The nuns then occupied the old school and took in orphan girls or girls who lived a great distance from the school as boarders. This new schoolhouse was blessed on Oct 27, 1889 at 3:30pm.