

History of Church of the Nativity

Church of the Nativity

As a member of the Dubuque West Pastorate, the Church of the Nativity contributes to a vibrant history. In 1922, Archbishop James Keane recognized a need for an additional parish due to the increase in Dubuque's Catholic population. He requested that Rev. Henry Rohlman, the business manager of Columbia College (Loras), organize the ninth parish in Dubuque on Alta Vista Street.

Rev. Rohlman and Dubuque architect Casimer Krazewski designed the Gothic Revival-style Church of the Nativity. The cornerstone of the new church and school combination was laid on July 4, 1923, with Rev. Rohlman as its first pastor. Judge Pollock's home on the corner of Alta Vista and Julien (University) Streets became the rectory. The congregation came from areas within the parishes of St. Mary's, St. Anthony's, St. Patrick's, and the Cathedral.

The parish grew so quickly that an addition was needed in 1926. The temporary church was remodeled into classrooms, and an English Gothic-style addition was added for the church. This later was known as Kerper Hall. The elementary school operated from 1924 to 2001 when it became part of the Holy Family Catholic Schools. The school's enrollment in 1924 was 425 students, but by 1956 that number had increased to almost 800. An additional eight classrooms had to be added. The school closed in 2005, but the Holy Family Middle School occupied the building during the school year of 2005 – 2006 while new facilities were built. The Sisters of the Visitation staffed the school from 1924 – 1989. The school and former church were demolished in 2017.

Plans for a new church began in 1963. Designed by Dubuque architect Donald McGinn, the new church was constructed of brick with interior walnut woodwork and polished Dubuque limestone on the floor. With seating for 1,350 and 42 stained glass windows manufactured in France, a massive altar carved from one piece of Minnesota limestone, and a tabernacle enclosed in the center of a nine-foot-tall column, the Church of the Nativity is an impressive and beautiful structure.

