

st mary's catholic church

greenville, south carolina



VISITOR'S GUIDE
AND
HISTORY OF THE PARISH

19th Century

St Mary's Church was founded in 1852, but Catholicism came to South Carolina as early as 1526, when Spanish Dominican priests celebrated Mass in the Low Country. The recorded history of Catholics in South Carolina, however, begins only in 1786, when an Italian priest who was a passenger on a ship that called at Charleston Harbor celebrated Mass in a private home for twelve people.

St Mary's Church on Hasell Street in Charleston was established on 24 August 1789 as the first Catholic parish in the Carolinas and Georgia, a territory now embracing five dioceses. The first bishop of the Diocese of Charleston, Bishop John England arrived in South Carolina from Ireland and took possession of the diocese on 30 December 1820.

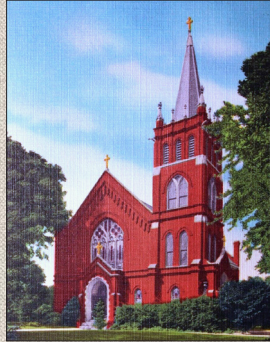


St Mary's, Greenville was founded in 1852 as the first Catholic church in Upstate South Carolina, and the original territory of the parish included all of twelve counties (Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, and Union) and for that reason, St Mary's is reckoned the mother church of Catholicism in Upstate South Carolina.

Masses in the Upstate were held in private homes until 1876 when the first small wooden church was constructed at the intersection of Hampton Avenue and Lloyd Street, four blocks to the west of our present campus. The church was dedicated to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. From the beginning, however, the parish was always referred to simply as St Mary's.

In 1885, our sixth pastor, Father John J. Monaghan, purchased our present property, and the small church was moved by flatbed to the site of our current church.

20th Century



In 1900, after opening our parish school, our ninth pastor, Father Andrew Keene Gwynn, hired an architect who was also a Benedictine monk at Belmont Abbey in North Carolina to build a new brick church, a school, and a gym. Dom Michael McNerny, OSB designed Catholic churches and schools throughout the South and his style came to be called “American Benedictine.” St Mary’s Church is a splendid example of that architectural idiom, and it represents two phases in McNerny’s work because it is actually two buildings in one: the first part was dedicated on 6 November 1904, and the extension, which was completed under our tenth pastor, Father Charles J. Baum, was dedicated 4 November 1956.

The first McNerny church included the present sanctuary (the raised area containing the altar) and the nave up to the bell tower on the east side of the building, and the original facade was approximately where the interior side doors are now located. To increase seating for the ever larger congregation, the nave was more than doubled in length, new stained glass windows were installed, and the choir loft and confessionals were added in the rear of the church.



21st Century

In 2002 Saint Mary's Church was beautifully restored as our part of our 150th anniversary celebration. Every surface in the church was renewed, and new floors and mechanical and electrical systems were installed throughout the building.

Michael McDunn, a master woodworker and parishioner, oversaw the transformation of the wood in the sanctuary. The old reredos was reconfigured with additions from the tester or canopy which was once suspended over the altar, and all of the wood was reconditioned for a new century of service. A new tabernacle stand was constructed at the center of the reredos, and a tabernacle from Spain was installed for the reservation of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

A seal of the parish for the center of reredos and an ambo with Gothic arches and carved figures of the crucifix and the four evangelists were fashioned in Charleston by Charles Ramberg, a custom furniture builder, and Mary May, a professional wood carver. All of our pews and sanctuary furniture were refinished, and the baptismal font was placed at the main door of the church while the statues of Saint Joseph, the Blessed Mother holding the Christ Child, and the Sacred Heart were returned to the sanctuary.





Running through the nave are the Fourteen Stations of the Cross, a devotion made popular by Saint Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. At a time when Christians could not travel safely to Jerusalem because the Holy City was under Islamic rule, St Francis devised a simple method for Christians to follow the Lord Jesus in the Way of the Cross in their own churches. The fourteen traditional stops or stations on the Via Dolorosa are depicted in works of art that invite pilgrims to pause and pray while meditating on Christ's passion and atoning death on the Cross.



The stained glass windows in the nave are the work of an artist who was an apprentice at Franz Mayer of Munich, but was working for the Hiemer Studio of Clifton, New Jersey.



The stained glass window of the Crucifixion and Resurrection is original to the 1904 building and was made in Germany by the famed Franz Mayer of Munich studio.

At the center of the scene is the Lord Jesus on the Cross, to which St Mary Magdalene clings at the base.

To the left is the Blessed Virgin Mary standing between Mary the mother James and Joses and Mary the wife of Cleopas.

To the right is St John the Beloved Disciple standing between his mother Salome and the centurion who cried out “Truly, this was the Son of God!”

Finally, at the stop of the window is an image of the Resurrected Lord Jesus revealed in eternal divine glory as God the Son - the Way, the Truth, and the Life.



In the sanctuary are three liturgical objects of particular interest. The altar is the primary symbol of Christ the High Priest of the new and eternal Covenant who offered himself as a sacrifice for our salvation, and on this altar the Most Holy Eucharist is celebrated each day in fulfillment of his command: “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11.24).



The ambo or pulpit is the place from which the Word of God is proclaimed and explained so that the people may receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the obedience of faith.





The tabernacle is the sacred space in which the Most Blessed Sacrament is reserved at all times so the sick who cannot join the assembly for Sunday worship may receive Holy Communion at home or in the hospital and so that those who come here to pray throughout the week may encounter the sacramental Presence of the Lord Jesus who calls out to His disciples: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11.28).

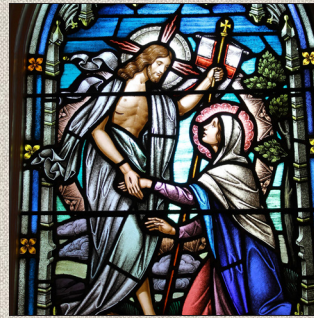






The large window in the choir loft is by Franz Mayer of Munich, 1904. Each of the four panels highlights an event in the Gospels: the Lord's nativity, His presentation in the temple, the boy Jesus teaching the scholars, and our Lord's first miracle at the wedding feast at Cana.





Saint Mary's Catholic Church
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