

St. Joseph's Church has long history

Although many area residents are under the impression that Catholicism is fairly new to Anderson, its actual existence can be traced back to 1791 when the French Catholic family of Pierre LaBon (later Anglicized to LaBoon) resided in Brushy Creek Township in old Pendleton District, now Anderson County.

During the winters of 1792-1793 a priest came to the home of Pierre LaBon and made annual visits throughout Anderson County until 1799.

For the next 50 years, Catholicism did, in fact, lie dormant in the area. But in 1850 it was revived when the Rev. Jeremiah J. O'Connell, D.D., a Columbia Missions priest, began visiting Anderson twice a year, staying with the families of Timothy Whelon and William and James Shanahan.

With the commencement of construction of the Blue Ridge Railroad, many Irish Catholic workmen settled in an area which was to become known as Tunnel Hill.

St. Patrick's Catholic Church and an adjoining rectory were built, and the Rev. J.J. O'Connell, aided by his brothers, Father Lawrence and Father Joseph, made this their headquarters for all up-state missions beginning with Anderson.

Through the fund-raising of Capt. John McGrath and M.D. Kennedy, funds were raised for the purpose of purchasing a lot and building a church. On Dec. 25, 1868, a lot at the corner of N. McDuffie and Earle Streets was deeded to the Rt. Rev. P.N. Lynch, then Bishop of Charleston.

Priests from the Greenville Missions held services monthly in the McGrath and Kennedy homes until the congregation outgrew them.

The Rev. Father Woolahan, a priest assigned to Anderson, later became St. Joseph's first pastor. Other priests during this period were Father A.N. Folchi and Father F.A. Schmitz.

The completed St. Joseph's Catholic Church was dedicated on May 19, 1881, by the Rt. Rev. Lynch.

Mrs. Bridget Carroll Kennedy, the wife of M.D. Kennedy, was the first to be buried in the small cemetery located in back of the church.

About the turn of the century the Catholic population increased, and by 1910 the congregation had outgrown the church.

The Rev. Andrew K. Gwynn, pastor in Greenville from 1900 to 1935, enlarged and renovated the church after having solicited donations from northern friends and sought assistance from parishoners and non-Catholics of the city. Gwynn continued serving the parish until 1919 when the Anderson Missions was established and the Rev. Thomas J. Mackin was appointed first resident pastor.

Two other churches became a part of the Anderson Missions, Sacred Heart in Abbeville and Our Lady of Lourdes in Greenwood. After three years, the Rev. Timothy J. McGrath was appointed to succeed Father Mackin. In 1925 the Rev. E.F. Sweeney was named pastor. Then, in 1926, Anderson was returned to the Greenville Missions and was once again without a resident priest.

In 1929 Father McGrath was commissioned to return to Anderson as resident pastor. He built a rectory adjacent to the church on McDuffie Street.

Father Henry L. Spiesman was appointed fifth pastor in 1930 and served the Catholic community of Anderson for ten years.

Father Spiesman was succeeded by Father Maurice Daly, who served for twelve years. In 1952 Father Christopher V. Barry was named pastor, and in 1954 Father Remegius Fleishell, OFM, was appointed administrator.

In 1956 the Diocese of Charleston purchased a house at 601 Boulevard for use as a convent. Four mission helpers of the Sacred Heart Sisters took up residence and began a Catholic Center containing classrooms and facilities for parish affairs. Thus began the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and a course of study for children and adults. At that time the rectory was relocated to 605 Boulevard.



Old church and rectory of St. Joseph's Catholic Church

Father William J. Croghan was appointed as St. Joseph's eighth pastor. In December of 1958 Francis Friend was ordained to the Holy Priesthood in Rome, the first native of St. Joseph's parish to become a priest. At that time the parish included Belton,

Honea Path, Williamston, Iva and Starr and served approximately 125 families.

The Rev. Louis R. Williamson was appointed the ninth pastor of the church in 1959 and died in June of 1962 due to an inoperable brain tumor.

When Rev. St. John E. Patat became St. Joseph's tenth pastor in 1962, the parish family had grown to approximately 200. Eight acres of land was purchased on Cornelia Road in 1963, and the McDuffie Street property was sold. Bishop Francis F. Reh,

Charleston, officiated at the ground-breaking for a church hall and elementary grade school in 1964 on the Cornelia Road property, and in November, Father Patat offered the first Mass in the new hall.

During the following three years the school building was used for CCD classes and other parish activities. In 1967 four teaching nuns from the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi, Glen Riddle, Pa., began teaching students. The school consisted of five grades, with the 63 students of St. Joseph's School

were taught by Sister James Michael, principal, Sister Marie Josephine, Sister Clarence Marie and Sister Mary Camillus. Grade six was added later, completing the elementary school.

When the Rev. Thomas D. Timlin assumed duties as eleventh pastor, one of the first orders of business was to liquidate the debt of \$191,309 incurred during the building and expansion program of the 1960s. The

McDuffie Street property was put up for sale and removal of the church cemetery was planned.

A news release in the *Anderson Daily Mail* on Jan. 16 stated that attorney William Ellison Long was

handling the legal action required to exhume and rebury the remains of more than 36 early Andersonians from the downtown church cemetery. Although several of the deceased were born in foreign coun-

tries, they had fought in the Civil War. Long said that the property deed represented one of the longest continuous "ownerships" in county history.

In 1973 the Rev. Paul F.X. Seitz became Anderson's twelfth pastor. He secured a home and proper-

ty adjoining the church property fronting on McLeese Road and contracted for a large black-topped parking area. The home was then remodeled to accommodate the teaching Sisters. These im-

provements added to the beauty of and accessibility to the church and provided a proper residence for the Sisters within walking distance of the school. By this time the parish had grown to 300 families.

Father Seitz remained in Anderson until 1978 when he was succeeded by Father David A. Degan. The Rev. Francis Travis assists Father Degan with duties and responsibilities.

The number of Catholic families in Anderson County has since increased to 400, and according to church historian Mrs. Agnes Shook, "They have been blessed with good and faithful priests and realize

that seemingly insurmountable odds have been overcome in the history of their parish. They are also aware that prayer and work for the growth of the Kingdom of God on earth must continue much the same today as in former days when the faithful prayed and worked for dreams now realized."