



The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
Atlanta, Georgia
Dedicated on May 1, 1898





May 1, 2023

The 125th Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church

Dear Friends in Christ,

While first established as a Parish on July 1, 1880 and situated at the corner of Marietta and Alexander (now Ivan Allen Blvd.) Streets, it was 125 years ago on May 1, 1898, that the Right Reverend Thomas A. Becker, sixth Bishop of Savannah, gathered with the Diocesan priests who had staffed the parish at that former location and the Marist priests who newly staffed the parish at its current location, to celebrate the Rites for the Dedication of a Church. At the same time, the bishop changed the Titular Patron of the parish from Sts. Peter and Paul to Sacred Heart of Jesus.

With a deep and long-running history our parish community is very much “A Tradition in Progress.” The juxtaposition of those two words creates a most apropos reflection for us at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as we celebrate the Quasquicentennial of the Dedication of our Church.

“Tradition” is certainly a familiar word here at the Basilica. To this very day we carry on the liturgical prayer and ministerial work which has been our noble and consistent tradition for the last 125 years within our beautiful church structure. And while many may not always associate the word “Progress” with the Roman Catholic Church, any Catholic parish that does not look ahead will not remain relevant for long.

Standing together upon this precipice with 125 years of glorious history, we now step together into the next 125 years with a glorious vision. Indeed, our

vision must be primarily focused on the future if we expect our prayer and our work to continue moving forward. As tempting as it is to rest on our laurels, forward motion is a sign of life. Like St. John Henry Newman said, “Growth is the only evidence of life.” We must continue to grow in order to live; we must continue to evolve in order to be relevant sharers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for generations to come.

Throughout our parish’s history in downtown Atlanta the city itself has known growth, decline, and most recently much revitalization in businesses and healthcare, education, and housing. Through our time: 27 Pastors have led this parish community and countless other priests and deacons have assisted them; faith formation of young Catholics has taken varied forms with Catholic schools and parish-based programming; service and support for those in need has been a consistent ministerial priority, always shifting focus along with shifting needs; two pandemics have been suffered and lived through; buildings have been built and renovated over; even the interior of our church has had five distinct decorative and theological shifts throughout its 125 years; and through it all God has been sought and praised by generations of parishioners and visitors who here have experienced the Divine Love that flows from Jesus’ Sacred Heart, that pulses alongside the rhythm of time: past, present and future.

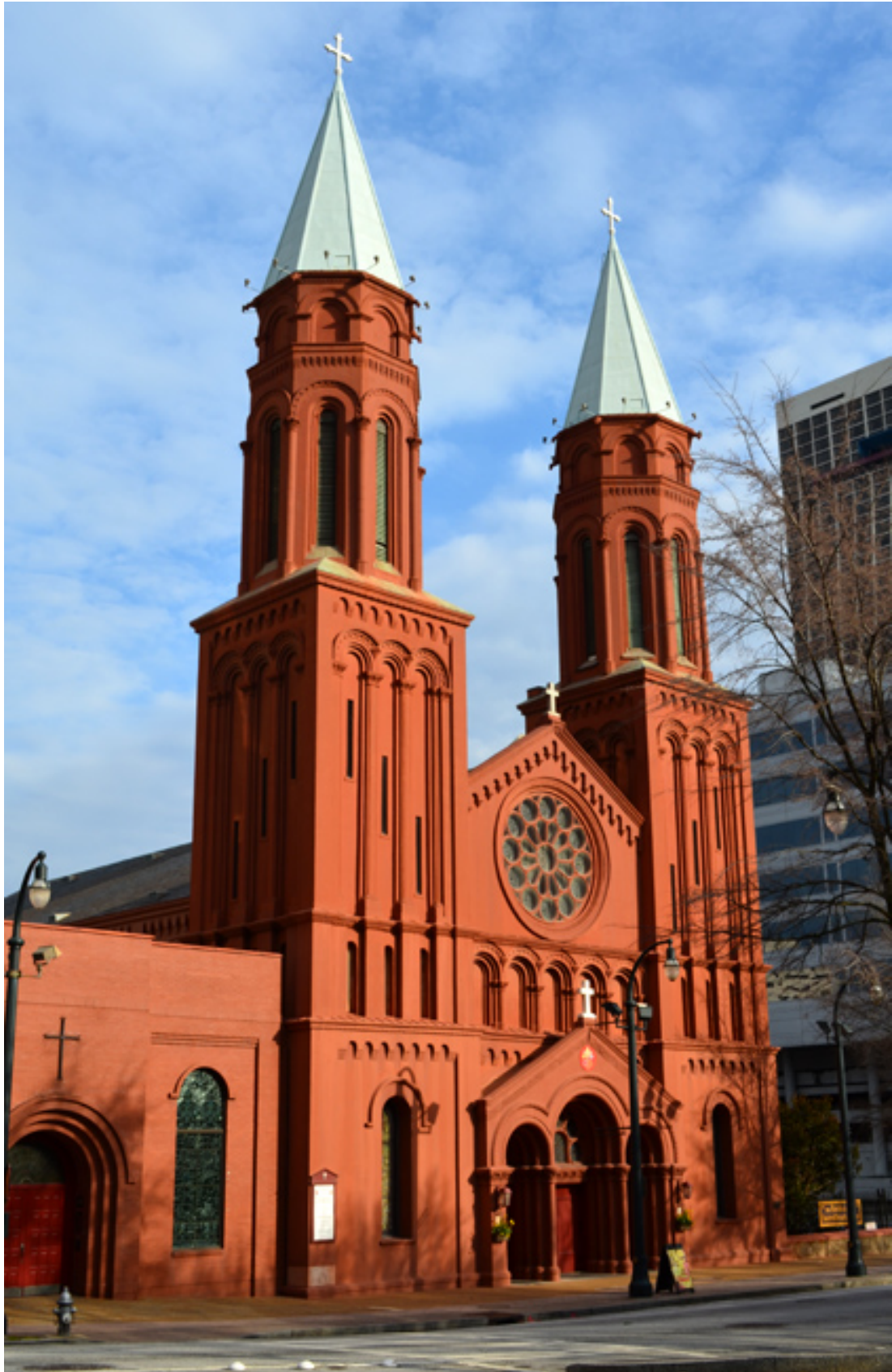
Clearly our parish community has continually been changing. And as generations before us have done, we too must always respond, adapt and be flexible enough to serve the needs of the parish and its mission in changing times.

“A Tradition in Progress.” These are two important facets of our mission as Disciples of the Lord Jesus that require our reflection to navigate our way into the future. I thank you for your faithfulness to him, your commitment to the mission with which he entrusts us, and for all your support and prayers. Please know of my prayer for you always!

Sincerely yours in Christ Risen,



Very Reverend John T. Howren
Rector



PASTORS OF SACRED HEART

1880 – 1889	Reverend Patrick H. McMahon
1889 – 1890	Reverend John S. McCarthy
1890 – 1897	Reverend Joseph F. Colbert
1897 – 1898	Reverend William Gibbons, SM
1898 – 1911	Reverend John E. Gunn, SM
1911 – 1914	Reverend George S. Rapier, SM
1914 – 1920	Reverend Peter McOscar, SM
1920 – 1926	Reverend James A. Horton, SM
1926 – 1932	Reverend Michael A. Cotter, SM
1932 – 1935	Reverend Edward P. McGrath, SM
1935 – 1941	Reverend James T. Reilly, SM
1941 – 1944	Reverend William J. Lonergan, SM
1944 – 1947	Reverend Edward P. McGrath, SM
1947 – 1956	Reverend Harry T. Hayes, SM
1956 – 1959	Reverend Robert W. Ripp, SM
1959 – 1965	Reverend Thomas J. Roshetko, SM
1965 – 1966	Reverend Joseph E. Moylan
1966 – 1967	Reverend Joseph F. Ware
1967 – 1973	Reverend John J. Mulroy
1973 – 1983	Reverend Michael A. Morris
1983 – 1990	Monsignor Daniel J. O'Connor
1990 – 1991	Sister M. Valentina Sheridan, RSM
1991 – 1994	Reverend Steven L. Yander
1994 – 2002	Monsignor Stephen T. Churchwell
2002 – 2005	Monsignor Frank J. Guista
2005 – 2012	Very Reverend Thomas J. Meehan
2012 – 2020	Monsignor Edward J. Thein
2020 – Present	Very Reverend John T. Howren



1898

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

1880 On February 28, Bishop William H. Gross, CSsR, Fifth Bishop of Savannah, establishes the second Catholic Parish in the City of Atlanta, naming it Sts. Peter and Paul. On July 4, the new structure, located at the corner of Marietta and Alexander (now Ivan Allen Blvd.) Streets, is Dedicated by Bishop Gross after a large procession from Immaculate Conception Church. Later a School is established and staffed by the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

St. Joseph's Infirmary is established on Baker Street. The Religious Sisters of Mercy nurse the sick and the poor there. St. Joseph's Hospital moves to Peachtree-Dunwoody Road in 1978.

1897 On May 6, Bishop Thomas A. Becker, Sixth Bishop of Savannah, entrusts the parishioners of Sts. Peter and Paul to the care of Marist priests. In September the Marists purchase land at the corner of Peachtree and Ivy (now Peachtree Center Ave.) Streets for the construction of a new Church.

On November 21, the Cornerstone is laid with a grand ceremony. Bishop Becker presides, and Father Benjamin Keiley (formerly a Pastor of Immaculate Conception and later the Seventh Bishop of Savannah) preaches.

1898 On May 1, Bishop Becker Dedicates the new Church designed by Atlanta Architect Walter T. Downing, who also designed many Atlanta homes and buildings such as the Healey Building, Atlanta Women's Club and edifices at Oglethorpe University. At this time Bishop Gross also changes the parish's Titular Patron to The Sacred Heart of Jesus, in keeping with the increasingly popular devotion of the time.



1900

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

1899 The first Organ, a Hook and Hastings, is installed and blessed in what was at the time a much smaller Choir Loft tucked underneath the Rose Window. An inaugural concert takes place on May 5, with Rossini's *Stabat Mater* highlighted among other famous compositions.

1901 Several liturgical appointments are donated to Sacred Heart by a generous Catholic Philanthropist, Mrs. William J. Burns, of Pittsburgh, PA. These include the Baptismal Font, Paschal Candle Stand and a Pulpit.

Marist College is built adjacent to the church and opened to its first wave of students in October. Marist remains here until 1962.

1902 The Stained Glass Windows, 28 in all, from Mayer Studios of Munich and New York, are installed. Several storied surnames of early Atlanta Catholics are inscribed in donated windows, such as Spalding and Haverty, as well as two Marist Bishops: Gunn and Keyes.

The Choir Loft is expanded, extending it into the nave and over the interior entrance of the church.

1907 The church experiences its first renovation. Exteriorly, the originally shingled steeples are faced with copper. Interiorly the Austrian artist, Paulo Pavesich, who had frescoed Atlanta's Grand Theatre, Terminal Station and the home of Samuel M. Inman, frescoes the walls of the Church. (Mr. Pavesich went on to decorate the home of Marshall Field in Chicago and the State Capitol in Lincoln, Nebraska.) He paints the apse of Sacred Heart with a lattice design, melding colors of ivory, violet and gold. The curved altar walls are done in a tapestry design with oriental shades. In addition, a new Altar is installed behind the previous one to increase its size.



1911

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

- 1908** Six Confessionals are installed, faced with carved Philippine Mahogany.
- 1909** The Sisters of St. Joseph open Sacred Heart Elementary School.
- 1911** The Pastor, Rev. John E. Gunn, is named the Sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Natchez (now the Diocese of Jackson) in Mississippi, by Pope St. Pius X. He is consecrated Bishop here at Sacred Heart on August 29 by the Archbishop of New Orleans, with the Bishops of Mobile and Little Rock assisting.
- 1912** The City of Atlanta graded and raised Ivy Street (now Peachtree Center Ave.), making the Church's front doors street-level, disappearing the granite steps underneath the sidewalk.
- 1913** The Sisters of St. Joseph open Sacred Heart High School for Girls
- 1914** The First Rectory is built and blessed on March 19, the Solemnity of St. Joseph. A large structure, it serves as a residence for Marists who staff the Sacred Heart Church, the Marist College and those priests and brothers who do Missionary work throughout North Georgia.
- 1917** Another interior renovation takes place at the same time as the current Sacristy is added onto the back of the Church. A new Fresco of gold tapestry design, with an image of Christ ascending into the glories of heaven while exposing his Sacred Heart, is painted in the apse. Beautiful faux stone is frescoed onto the walls throughout the Sanctuary and Nave. New lighting is hung from the ceiling.
- 1918** The Spanish Flu Pandemic strikes, forcing Mass to be celebrated outside on the steps of the Rectory, alongside the Church.



1920

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

1920 With the building renovated twice over and now paid in full, a Consecration Liturgy is celebrated on June 9, by Bishop Edward Allen of Mobile, assisted by Bishop Benjamin Keiley of Savannah. Bishop John Gunn of Natchez, as former Pastor of Sacred Heart, was scheduled to do the honors; however, he was too ill to make the journey to Atlanta from Mississippi.

1923 The second Organ, an E. M. Skinner, is installed and blessed on February 8.

On May 5, the Eighth Bishop of Savannah, Michael Keyes, SM, comes to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of Sacred Heart.

1924 A new building is erected to house Sacred Heart Parochial School

1926 A new Convent is built on Baker Street for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (St. Louis, Missouri), who staffed Sacred Heart School.

1939 Another renovation of the Interior begins with the nave's walls and ceiling being whitewashed. And the mural in the apse sees its 3rd iteration, to reflect the "art deco" style of the day. This is the same mural we see now. But the artist is unknown.

The upper half of the Altar is dismantled, and the Tabernacle removed, along with the brass domed Cupola that housed the brass Crucifix. In its place is installed a new Tabernacle (which we see today), and an oversized Crucifix, with curtains behind and a rounded curtained canopy above, to frame it. This configuration, however, has the undesirable effect of completely hiding the center archway, distorting the Romanesque architecture featured throughout the Church.



1950

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

- 1950** The rounded curtain canopy is squared-off.
- 1955** The squared-off curtain canopy is replaced by the wooden Baldachin in a Victorian Style, which unfortunately does not marry well to Romanesque architecture.
- 1956** On July 2, Pope Pius XII creates another Diocese in Georgia: The Diocese of Savannah maintains the southern half of the state; the newly created Diocese of Atlanta covers the northern half.
- 1961** The Copper Steeples are replaced on March 13. Soon after, the front of the Church is refaced, and the Cornerstone is refashioned.
- 1962** Pope John XXIII elevates the Diocese of Atlanta to an Archdiocese on February 10.

In the Spring, Marist College moves north to Ashford-Dunwoody Road, and becomes known as Marist School.

- 1965** The Marist Fathers leave Sacred Heart and are given pastoral care of Our Lady of the Assumption parish, near Marist School's new site; Archdiocesan Clergy resume pastoral care of Sacred Heart Church on September 5.
- 1968** The liturgical requirements of Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* initiates the installation of a free-standing Altar so that the Priest-celebrant could face the people to pray Mass with them, rather than for them; however, nothing is done to remove the old Altar.

The first regularly scheduled Mass in Spanish within the Archdiocese of Atlanta begins at Sacred Heart Church in November.



1960

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

- 1975** A third Organ, a Fratelli Ruffatti, was installed and blessed.
- 1976** Sacred Heart Church is entered into the National Register of Historic Places on May 13.
- 1977** A new Building is erected to house Parish Offices and a Rectory for Priests in April. And another Renovation of the Church interior begins, with new parquet flooring being installed underneath the pews, the apse's mural is touched-up, and the ceiling and walls are again whitewashed.
- 1978** Sacred Heart Church, newly renovated, is severely damaged by a Firebomb thrown through a basement window.
- 1980** The Centennial of the Parish's February 28, 1880 founding is celebrated.
- 1982** A fourth Organ, a custom-built digital Allen Organ, is installed and blessed.
- 1990** Another Interior Refresh takes place: Column capitals are gilded and a new Altar, though still moveable, made of wood and marble, is installed and then dedicated by Archbishop James Lyke.
- 1995** Mother Theresa of Calcutta celebrates Mass at Sacred Heart on June 12, when visiting Atlanta for the opening of "The Gift of Grace House" within our parish boundaries. Her Missionary Sisters of Charity minister to homeless women with HIV to this day.
- 1996** Sacred Heart hosts Catholic visitors to Atlanta for the XXVI Olympiad Summer Games.



2010

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

- 1998** Sacred Heart celebrates the Centenary of the Church's May 1, 1898 Dedication.
- 2003** A fifth Organ, a Stanley Scheer, is installed and blessed on May 18, with an inaugural concert by Parish Organist, Billy Krape. The front row pipes, albeit not functioning, are from the 1899 Organ and are repainted to original specifications.
- 2009** Stained Glass Windows are reconditioned, and exterior protection is installed.
- 2010** Pope Benedict XVI elevates Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church to a Minor Basilica on February 22. A Mass of Elevation is celebrated on August 10, by Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory.
- 2011** "Inspired by Faith Campaign" completes renovations of the 1978 Building's 1st Floor O'Hagan Hall, Commercial Kitchen, Faith Formation Meeting-rooms, and Glass-roofed Atrium; also the 2nd Floor Parish Offices; also the 3rd Floor Rectory.
- 2017** "Save the Spires Campaign" is inaugurated once it is found that the interior mortar of the spires was crumbling. This is a major undertaking to, quite literally, save the spires from collapse.
- 2020** The COVID-19 Pandemic wreaks havoc across the globe, causing Sacred Heart, like everywhere else, to suspend public operations. However, with new technologies available, the parish makes every effort to maintain connection with and among parishioners who must shelter in place.
- 2021** A new HVAC system is installed, replacing the 1950s system that had lasted well beyond its allotted time.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

2023 The 125th Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church is celebrated in various ways between November 2022 and May 2023. The Laying of the Cornerstone 125 years before is commemorated with a Tree-Planting in November. An Advent Lessons & Carols followed by a Gaudeamus Reception is held in December. A *Valentine Parti Gras Masquerade Ball* is held in February. A series of Church Tours offered to the larger community takes place in March. A Mass commemorating the May 1, 1898 Dedication of the Church is celebrated on Sunday, April 30, with the archdiocese's newest Auxiliary Bishop, John N. Tran, presiding. And in May, a Time Capsule is buried with many interesting items inside for our successors to open and enjoy 125 years from now, in the year 2148.

Finally, this Commemorative Booklet is published to do two things. First, it celebrates the history of this Parish Church and its People of Faith over the last 125 Years. Second, it introduces a bold and beautiful vision to add to the marvelous story, as we step into the next 125 years. Out of our strong sense of care and responsibility for this incredible structure, we are motivated to honor this sacred place's future as well as its past. For here as people have come, so they will continue to come, to encounter the Risen Christ ... to have their hearts transformed by his Sacred Heart of love for them. And just as all those who have prepared this place for our spiritual walk with the Lord, "for such a time as this" we must now do our part for those yet to make their journey.



FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS !

(Esther 4:14)