

A Research Report on  
The History of the Church of the Madalene

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## The History of the Church of the Madalene

The Church of the Madalene has an interesting history which all began in 1945. <sup>1946</sup> The grounds where the church now stands were at that time ~~a golf~~ <sup>ADJACENT TO a golf</sup> course. <sup>and over coal mine area</sup> After World War II it was apparent that housing in Tulsa would expand south and east so Christ the King parish purchased this land to provide a new parish for Tulsa Catholics. The new parish was organized in 1946 and consisted of approximately one hundred families.

The original church was a one room building that later became the school cafeteria. There were no pews, only chairs and kneeling pads. This one-room building also was the first school. During the week four partitions were used to divide the room into several different classrooms. The first pastor of the church was Father James McNamee.

In 1948 and 1949 four classrooms were added to the original building. Then again in 1953, more extensive changes took place. Seven classrooms and what is now the main church and vestibule were built. The original one room was then used as a school cafeteria and is now used as a parish hall, a place for parties, breakfasts, dinners, wedding receptions, dances, and also for special masses. These many changes and additions were made possible by the parishoners whose hard work raised money for the church, especially the Men's Club and the Women's Club, both of which are still in operation today.

The church was formally dedicated by Rev. Eugene J. <sup>MR GUINESS</sup> Lewis on December 10, 1953. Madalene Church received its name from the French form of the name Saint Mary Magdalene.

Madalene Church was designed by the architect David G. Murray, a member of the American Institute of Architects. It was built in a contemporary style

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MOST OF THE BRICK, PERSONALLY.

with no side windows. It was one of the first air-conditioned churches in Oklahoma. The church is built of red brick and Tennessee sandstone, which was a new concept. The church is built at an angle with the altar on the west side of the building. This was done so that all light that comes through the stained glass window at the back of the church on the east side will angle toward the altar. The interior is done in open stone-work style, rather stark and simple, with the focus on the huge crucifix over the altar. There are no visible side altars. The one stained glass window is of a contemporary block style. In 1954 the church won an award for excellence in architectural design. In the early 70's the church and parish hall were redecorated. The seating of the church is approximately 500 persons. Madalene was also the first Catholic church in the country to join the Council of Churches.

Father Walsch, a well-known Oklahoma artist, is the man responsible for the art-work in the church. He designed the crucifix and even made it on the grounds of the church out of native clay. The ceramic stations of the cross were made by the parishioners. They were designed by Mrs. Weigel, but ~~all~~ the people of the church helped in the baking of the stations. They used their kilns and ovens for this process. As is stated, the parishioners were always willing to give their time and energy for the purpose of getting the Church of the Madalene started.

Besides the Men's Club and Women's Club there are also many other groups that Madalene sponsors for both social and charitable causes. These groups include: Diocesan Development Fund, Catholic World Relief, Neighbor for Neighbor, Guatemalan Mission, Priest Retirement Fund, Comanche Manor in Tulsa, Rice Bowl (for the poor in Asia), Bishop Kelley High School, and the church

also has sponsored several Vietnamese families. Some clubs that the people themselves are active in are: Adult Club (senior citizens), Singles Club, Divorced Catholic group, Bowling Leagues, Church Nursery, and the newest one, the Youth Group consisting of the junior high and senior high students of the parish.

The personnel of the church is very important. Presently there are four nuns who run the educational program and a choir director to direct the congregation in their singing. There is also a liturgy committee and an organization of altar boys. The church is run by the parish council which consists of one member from each of the seven districts and is elected by the people of his district. There are two delegates-at-large, priests, nuns, and a delegate to the Deanery (Bishop) who are also on the council. The council's purposes are to decide the needs of the parish and approve finances. The educational program or religious education, as it is called, is run by the priests, nuns, and volunteer teachers from among the parishoners who educate the children of the parish who do not attend Catholic or parochial schools.

To give you an idea of what Catholicism is about here is a list of some of the basic beliefs of the Catholic faith:

- 1) The supremacy of the Pope in matters of faith and morals.
- 2) Communion is the changing into the actual body and blood of Christ. This is why we believe our soul should be without mortal sin, which is the purpose of confession before receiving Holy Communion.
- 3) Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Penance, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick are our seven sacraments. Sacraments are our aids to living Christian lives.

- 4) To be a Catholic in good standing you must be baptized, attend mass on Sunday and on holy days of obligation, receive Holy Communion, and you should go to confession at least once a year. You should be married according to the rules of the church and support your parish.
- 5) We believe in following the ten commandments.
- 6) We believe in the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception of Mary which means she was a virgin when Jesus was born and she did not go through death to get to heaven.
- 7) There are three beings in one, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- 8) We believe in life hereafter. We believe in heaven and hell.
- 9) We believe in praying for the dead as well as the living.

As mentioned before, Rev. James McNamee was the first priest and pastor of Madalene Church. He was born on April 19, 1902, in Ireland. He came to the United States at age nineteen. He studied to be a priest and was ordained the day after his twenty-third birthday. His first assignment was to the Holy Family Cathedral in Tulsa, Oklahoma. During World War II he served as an Army chaplain. In 1946, right after the war, he came to Tulsa and established the Church of the Madalene. He served as pastor until he retired in 1968. His fiftieth anniversary as a priest was celebrated at Madalene in 1975. He died in August of that year.

Father Mac, as he was affectionately called, left his imprint not only on Madalene but on the city of Tulsa as he was a very innovative, forward-thinking priest. For example, he advocated the liturgy in the vernacular years before Vatican II made this change. In fact, many changes brought about by Vatican II

were advocated by Father Mac in the 40's.

During Father Mac's tenure there were three different associates at different periods of time. These three were Rev. Joseph Carroll, Rev. William King, and Rev. Henry Kelly. When Father Mac retired, Rev. John J. Sullivan became the new pastor. Along with Rev. Sullivan came Rev. Dennis Dorney and in 1970 Rev. Thomas Biller. While Father Sullivan was at Madalene the redecorating of the church took place. He was also the pastor when the school was closed, which put more emphasis on the religious education program for those who do not attend parochial schools. In 1971, Father Sullivan's twenty-fifth anniversary as a priest was celebrated. In 1972, Rev. Sullivan was consecrated Bishop of Grand Island, Nebraska. When he left, Father Dorney was also transferred to another parish. During this period of time, 1968 through 1973, Mr. Frank O'Meara was employed as religious education director.

Monsignor Cecil E. Finn, formerly pastor of Christ the King parish for ten years, became the new pastor of Madalene in 1972. The same year Rev. Patrick Galaas was ordained and came to Tulsa to serve at the Madalene until 1976 when he was transferred to St. John's Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma. In the summer of 1976, Rev. Jake Males was ordained a priest and came to Madalene.

Madalene had a school which was in operation for twenty-two years. It opened in 1948 and the school's principal was Sister Elizabeth, followed by Sister Modesta who became principal six years later. The school gradually expanded and at one point contained about 400 students. At this time there were eight grades with six teaching sisters and two lay teachers. The two lay teachers were Mrs. Masel and Mrs. Morehead. The church also built two new classrooms for primary grades.

Madalene School as well as Madalene Church was very much a product of parish involvement. A bookkeeping system was set up by Mrs. Dottie Mica and Robert Skeehan, an accountant.

Sports activities were important to the school. The team often excelled in their division attested to by the many awards still on display in the trophy case. These sports activities were made possible by many men of the parish under the leadership and coaching of Mr. Robert Shaw, Hal O'Halloxan and Glen Dobbs, to name just a few.

Academically the school also excelled and the students received many awards. Due to a large enrollment and limited classrooms there were a few years when first grade students attended school for only half a day. At one point there were ninety-eight children who enrolled for first grade. Since Holy Family School had very few students in the early grades, Madalene first-graders were bused to Holy Family School in downtown Tulsa. However, continued swelling of the enrollment was forcing several grades to be combined in one classroom. Since this proved to be an unsatisfactory arrangement, in 1960, the first grade was closed.

Financial pressures became a major concern during the 1960's. Although the nuns and lay teachers worked for very low salaries and many parents volunteered their services in numerous ways from assisting in the cafeteria, working on the playground as supervisors, running the library, etc. the cost of meeting requirements to a maintain state accreditation became unfeasible. The school was then closed in 1970.

Mentioned before were two of the principals of the school. The rest of the principals were: Sister Pancretia (1957-59), Sister Antonette (1959-62),

Sister Imelda (1962-66), Mrs. Mary Cherry (1966-67), Mr. Robert Shaw (1967-70), and Sister Betty in 1970. The Benedictian order of sisters had staffed Madalene School since it opened.

Over the thirty-one years since Madalene parish was organized it has continually been recognized for its programs and leadership. The parish owes a special thanks to the priests and sisters and especially the first energetic parishoners who really got the parish going. However, many of the approximately 750 families comprising Madalene today are still an active group that back many church activities and functions including a religious education program for nearly 400 students. Classes are held three days of the week and are taught by the priests, four nuns and over forty volunteer teachers from the parish. With this kind of active participation the future looks as interesting as the past.



HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA AND TULSA:

BISHOPS:

Bishop Meerschaerts, became Bishop of Indian Territory in 1891  
first Bishop of the Diocese of Oklahoma in 1905

Bishop Kelley, succeeded Bishop Meerschaerts in 1924  
November 24th, 1930, the Diocese of Oklahoma  
City and Tulsa were formed from the Diocese  
of Oklahoma

Bishop McGinness, served as Bishop of Oklahoma City and Tulsa  
from 1944 til 1957

Bishop Reed, served as Bishop of Oklahoma City and Tulsa  
ffrom 1958 til 1971

Bishop Quinn, appointed Bishop of Oklahoma City and Tulsa  
in 1971  
became Archbishop in 1972 til 1977

Bishop Ganter, appointed first Bishop of the newly formed  
Diocese of Tulsa in 1972 til 1977

Bishop Beltran, appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Tulsa  
in 1978---our present Bishop and second  
Bishop of the Diocese.

Archbishop Salatka, appointed in 1977 and the present Archbishop  
of the Dioceses of Oklahoma City and Tulsa ---  
resides in Oklahoma City

HISTORY OF THE MADALENE PARISH:

Established as a Parish in 1947, Church was dedicated in 1953 by  
Bishop McGinness

PASTORS

Fr. James McNamee

Fr. John Sullivan

Msgr. Cecil Finn

ASSOCIATES

Fr. Joseph Carroll

Fr. Bill King

Fr. HENRY Kelley

Fr. Thomas Biller

Fr. Dennis Dorney

Fr. Patrick Gaalaas

Msgr. Finn

Fr. Jake Males  
Fr. Chris Daigle  
Fr. Leonard Higgins  
Fr. Biller