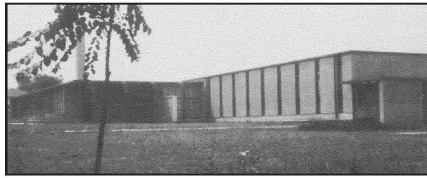


## A Brief History of St Mary Magdalene Catholic Church

For many years the Catholic families living in the Ingalls Park area of Joliet felt a great need for their own place of worship. With the permission of the Chancery Office, the Most Reverend Martin D. Mc Namara, Bishop of Joliet-in-Illinois and The Right Reverend Monsignor Romeo R. Blanchette, Chancellor, a Catholic census was conducted.

After identifying over 440 Catholic families in the Ingalls Park area and the Diocese decided to establish a new parish. On June 18, 1953, St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church was formally announced, and two days later, The Reverend John W. Desmond was appointed as its first Pastor.



Ground was broken for a new Church and School building on August 30, 1953 and actual construction began on September 8. On November 30, 1953, Monsignor Romeo R. Blanchette blessed and laid the cornerstone. The first Mass in the new Church was celebrated on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1954.

In June, a home was purchased at the corner of Washington and Hebbard Streets as a convent to house three Sister Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary. The eight classroom School was completed and furnished by early August. On August 29, 1954, Monsignor Romeo R. Blanchette dedicated the building exactly one year after the ground breaking ceremony.

First Communion was celebrated on October 10, 1954 with twenty-nine students. Ten students comprised the first graduating class in June, 1955. Twenty-four adults and fifty-four children were confirmed by Bishop Martin D. McNamara on November 10, 1955.

The Reverend John W. Desmond served as Pastor from 1953 to 1961. In October 1959, Pope John XXIII bestowed on him the honor of Domestic Prelate, with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor. In addition to his work at St. Mary Magdalene, Monsignor Desmond was the founding Editor of the diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic News Register*.



(center L-R) Monsignor Romeo Blanchette & Father John Desmond

A fund drive was announced by Fr. John Desmond to construct a new gymnasium and reduce the parish debt on October 10, 1958. Many pledges and donations were received and the Gymnasium became a reality. The parish Religious Education (C.C.D.) program for public school students began in 1959 with ninety-five grade school students and fifty-three high school students in attendance.

Fr. Vincent Lavery succeeded Monsignor Desmond as Pastor in October 1961. His previous assignments included service as a Chaplain in the Second World War (1944-1946), holding the rank of Lieutenant Commander. Fr. Lavery remained at St. Mary Magdalene until the arrival of John Slown in October 1972.

This was a difficult time for Saint Mary Magdalene Parish. In March, 1977 the Sister Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary, the Religious Community who founded Saint Mary Magdalene School announced they would be unable to continue to staff the school. During the same period, credible/ substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of children and young adults were reported. Several years after his departure from Saint Mary Magdalene, John Slown was convicted of sexually abusing a boy in DuPage County. Decades later, additional credible/ substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of minors in the mid-1970's at Saint Mary Magdalene were received. It is heartbreaking to learn of the painful experiences involving the young people of our parish. Our prayers are with the many adults who still struggle daily with the pain of sexual abuse from their childhood.

Upon his arrival in the Fall of 1977, Father Daniel Stempora began a process to heal the deep wounds existing in the parish. Eventually, a tithing program with a goal of undertaking an extensive remodeling of the school classrooms and gymnasium began. As a result of the generosity of the parishioners of St. Mary Magdalene, great amount of work was undertaken to upgrade the parish facilities. The gymnasium kitchen was remodeled, ceramic tile was added in the school hallways, new carpeting was installed in church and a new rectory garage was built.

During his Pastorate, St. Mary Magdalene Parish celebrated its Twenty-Fifth Anniversary. In honor of this milestone, Bishop Romeo R. Blanchette was Principal Celebrant of a special Mass on Sunday, October 8, 1978. In 1985, Fr. George Klepec served as Temporary Administrator while Fr. Stempora was on sabbatical.

Fr Dennis White was appointed Pastor in 1987. Due to complications diabetes and declining health, he was granted a medical leave in March of 1989. During the following three months Fr. William Irwin was Parish Administrator.

In 1989, Fr. Richard Ross became Pastor. Highly regarded for his patience and thoughtfulness, he oversaw the renovation of the Church. New carpeting was added and the side altars were refurbished. Century-old stained glass windows from St. Boniface Church in Chicago, crafted by the world renowned studios of F.X. Zetter in Munich, Germany were also installed.

A very spiritual man, with a huge heart and following to match arrived in June, 1999. Soon after his arrival, Fr. David Stalzer was diagnosed with lymphoma and succumbed to the disease on June 18, 2000.

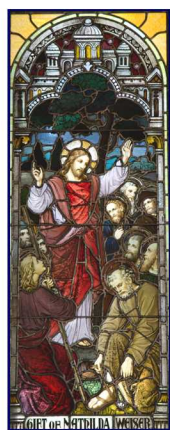
Fr. Ron Nietzke was appointed Pastor in July 2000. His first project was a five car garage, a programmable sign and classroom memorials. Other achievements included a debt reduction program, Sunday morning Children's Liturgy of the Word, a Parish Life Commission, Parish Council, Adult Bible Study, Modular Classroom for Kindergarten and Computer Lab, and Vacation Bible School. Fr. Nietzke also served as a Chaplain in the United States Naval Reserve, holding the Rank of Commander. On January 15, 2003, he was called to active duty in "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Iraq. With the support and prayers of parishioners, Fr. Nietzke safely returned to St. Mary Magdalene on June 16, 2003. During his deployment, Fr. Henry Wilkening was Temporary Administrator of St. Mary Magdalene Parish.



The closing of St. Mary Magdalene Catholic School was announced at the end of the 2008-2009 academic year. It was a difficult period for parishioners, school parents and faculty members who had valiantly worked for several years to increase enrollment and to address a rapidly increasing parish debt.

In June 2011, Fr. Christopher Groh was appointed Pastor. Upon his arrival, he quickly undertook responsibility for a major capital project necessitated by a leaking Church roof and aging air conditioning system. The renowned F. X. Zettler stained glass windows from Munich, Germany originally installed at St. Boniface Church in Chicago, were restored, resealed and reframed by the internationally respected Daprato Rigali Studios in Chicago. A new Johannus organ and Yamaha Clavinova digital piano were installed in Church and structural repairs were made to the Rectory. Adult and Children's Religious Education opportunities were enhanced and a Stewardship program was initiated to address nearly \$800,000.00 in school and parish indebtedness.

A highlight of 2013 was the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the parish and the veneration of a relic of St. Mary Magdalene. In October, 2013 Bishop Joseph Imesch commemorated the parish anniversary with the celebration of Confirmation and joined us for a special anniversary dinner.



In 2015 a successful Capital Campaign to complete the church restoration project was undertaken. Donations were used to restore and illuminate the Garden of Gethsemane and Wedding Feast of Cana stained glass windows. The Last Supper window was repaired and remounted in a new opening in the back wall of the Church, allowing natural light to enhance the magnificent details of the window.

New carpeting, porcelain flooring and custom designed pews were installed in the Church. The Altar of Sacrifice was repaired. A new Ambo and Altar of Reservation were added and a distinctive Baptismal Font with a black portoro basin, white carrerra base, rosa levanto marble accents and flowing water reflects the unifying material and design elements found in the Altar of Sacrifice, the Ambo and the Altar of Reservation.

With the overwhelming support of the parishioners, by 2020 the school and parish debt was retired and a new high efficiency boiler serving the Church and School was installed in 2021, replacing the original 1953 boiler. The establishment of a Major Repairs and Building Maintenance Fund has been successful in assuring the ability to address ongoing needs and future parish planning.

Many parishioners are involved in the liturgical ministries of Lector, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, Altar Servers, Greeters and Ushers, and Catechetical Ministries for children and adults.

New parish ministries include a Parish Social Group, the Ministry to Shut-ins and Nursing Homes, the Parish Prayer Line Ministry, support of the Catholic Charities Daybreak Shelter and other outreach ministries in the Joliet and New Lenox communities. A partnership with the Knights of Columbus Holy Trinity Council #4400 has been renewed.

In 2016, pastoral responsibility for St. Bernard Church was given to the Pastor of St. Mary Magdalene. This partnership has greatly enhanced both parishes. Ongoing Parish renewal, evangelization and projects to assist the needy of the area through the active cooperation and participation of parishioners in the life of St. Mary Magdalene and St. Bernard Catholic Churches continue to be priorities.