

Short History of Saint Jude Parish Chattanooga, Tennessee

St. Jude Parish has been celebrating 50 years as a parish (2008). As with any family, ours has a unique history – a story to tell. Part of that story is recounted in “St. Jude Parish: The First Twenty-Five Years” published in 1979. And the story goes...

A New Parish is Born. Many people living today remember when there was only one parish in the whole Chattanooga area. Until industry began to flourish and expand in this part of Tennessee, bringing with it a steady infusion of workers of many faiths, Saints Peter and Paul Church, established in 1853, was the only Catholic Church for many miles around. Between 1937 and 1958 six new parishes were erected in the metropolitan area. The establishment of Saint Jude Parish in north Chattanooga is thus part of the continuing story of the growth of the Catholic Church in Tennessee.

In September of 1957, Bishop Adrian selected Fr. Albert Henkel to take charge of the new district and to begin organizing the congregation. Fr. Henkel set to work surveying the situation, taking the census, organizing a campaign for funds, and planning the necessary construction. It was Fr. Henkel who first proposed Saint Jude, the Saint of Desperate Cases,” as the titular patron for the new parish. The Bishop gave his approval, and in January of 1958 the name became official. The formal decree erecting the Parish of Saint Jude and defining its boundaries was issued by Bishop Adrian on August 1, 1958, and was published in *The Tennessee Register* on August 15. A few days later, Fr. Henkel was assigned to Holy Ghost Parish in Knoxville, and Fr. Albert Louis Siener was selected to become pastor of Saint Jude.

A few weeks after his arrival Fr. Siener made arrangements to start having Mass in the newly established parish, for which purpose a hall over the Red Bank Pharmacy at 3912 Dayton Boulevard was leased for a year. On Sunday, October 12, 1958, Fr. Siener celebrated the first two Masses in the humble facility, with some 300 people attending.

By February of 1960 the finishing touches were being put on the present site of Saint Jude School. An open house drew several thousand people to tour the eight bright classrooms of steel, brick, and glass. Covered passageways led from one building to the next in the campus-plan school. In the largest building was the all-important auditorium, big enough to seat 500 people, sporting at one end a fully-equipped stage and at the other end a modern kitchen and cafeteria. Few observers realized then that this temporary facility would serve as the parish church for nearly 19 years.

The church where we now gather for worship was finally completed in 1979 under the leadership of Fr. Luzerne Schnupp. The first Mass was celebrated on January 13, 1979. A formal dedication of Saint Jude Church occurred on Friday, April 27, 1979, officiated by Bishop James D. Niedergeses.

The Parish Today. Presently Saint Jude has a census of some 1,000 registered families and is the proud “parent” of Holy Spirit, born in 1999 when 50 families left St. Jude to form a new parish in the Soddy Daisy area. Saint Jude School – from preschool to eighth grade – has a long history of service to the parish and dedication to Catholic education. In 2005 the Hofstetter Family Life Center was built to house an excellent gym, the kindergarten, our outstanding Scout program, and additional meeting space.

In the end, our family story of Saint Jude Parish is not totally about defining boundaries or raising buildings. A parish is more than a church or school building. It is a place where we form the Body of Christ and touch the living Son of God in the Eucharist – a special place where we experience and celebrate the seasons of joy, love, sadness, despair, and hope which come to each one of us, individually and as a community of faith.

Saint Jude 'Thaddeus' – Apostle of Our Lord

The Gospels tell us that Saint Jude was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve apostles. He is known as 'Judas, son of James' by Luke, as 'Thaddeus' by Matthew and Mark, and as 'Judas, not the Iscariot' by John. The name 'Thaddeus' means 'courageous' and seems to be used by Matthew and Mark to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot, the betrayer.

Little more is known about him, but tradition has him as a missionary throughout Palestine, Mesopotamia, Libya and Persia. He was martyred in Persia and his body was later buried in a crypt in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Saint Jude is traditionally depicted with an image of Jesus in his hand or holding a club. He is also symbolized by a long handled war axe. The image of Jesus comes from a story involving Saint Jude and the healing of King Agabar of Edessa. The club and the axe are from the story of his martyrdom. Also, there may be a tongue of flame upon his head to indicate that he, as an apostle, was present at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church.

One of the ways that the novena and devotion to Saint Jude became popular in the United States was through Father James Tort, a Claretian priest, assigned to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, a Mexican parish, on the south side of Chicago. In early 1929, the steel mills were cutting back their work forces and many of the people within the parish were left without jobs. From his private devotion to Saint Jude arose a parish novena first offered on February 17, 1929. The novena was prayed devoutly by the parish and grew to such magnitude that on the feast of Saint Jude on October 28, 1929 over 1,000 people gathered outside the already filled church to pray the novena with those inside.

Word of the novena grew and the events of 1929 – the Stock Market Crash, the Great Depression, and then World War II – increased the spread of the devotion to Saint Jude as the patron for all those in despair or in hopeless situations.

Our own parish prays this devotion each Wednesday evening after the 7:00 p.m. Mass.

Prayer from the Votive Mass of an Apostle

Lord,
strengthen us in the faith
that made the apostle Saint Jude so loyal to Christ your Son,
and by the help of his prayers
let your Church become the sign of salvation for all people.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever.
Amen.